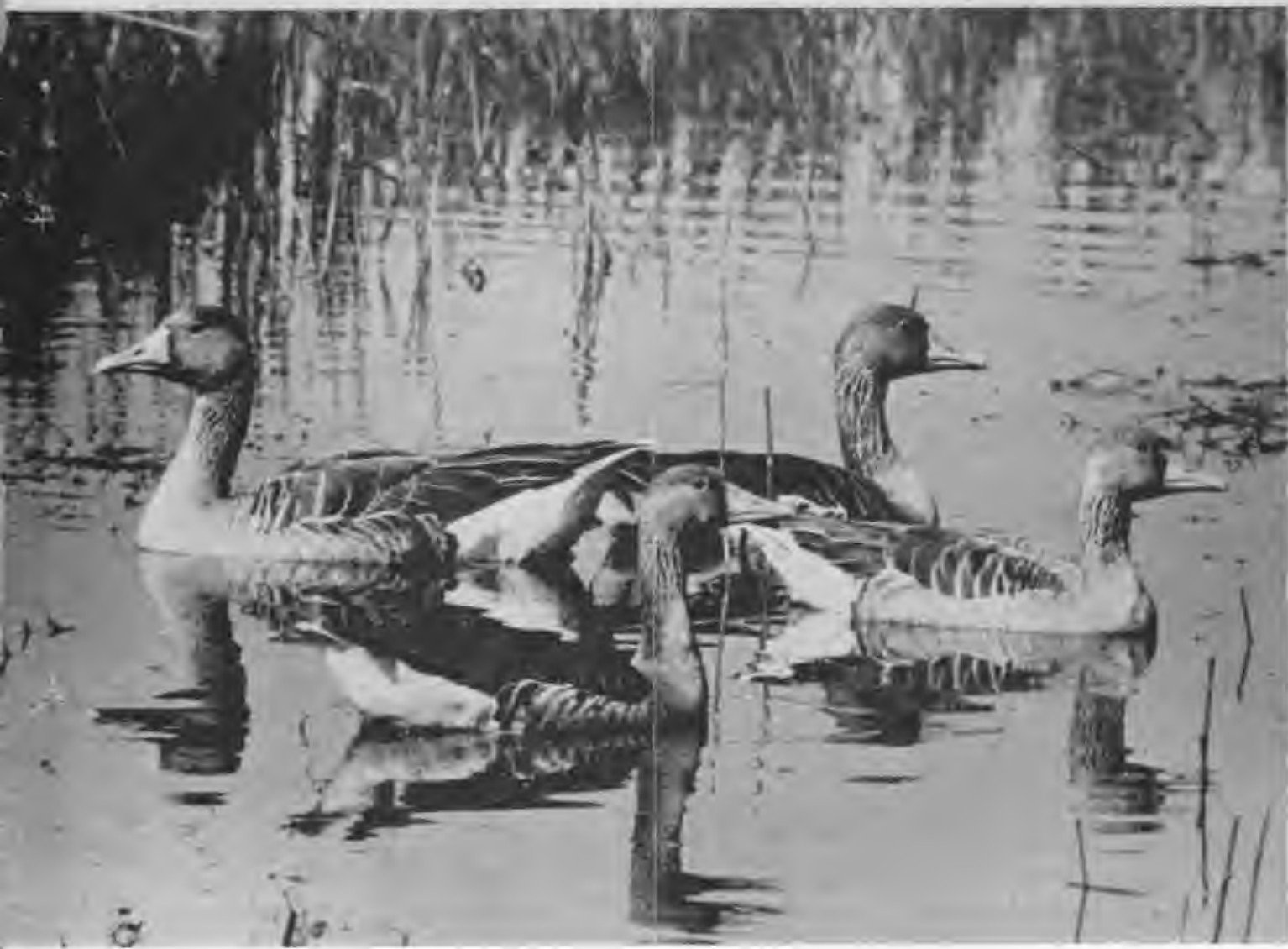


# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL XVI NO. 1 JANUARY 1976



BIRDWATCHERS FIELD CLUB OF INDIA  
NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

DODDA GUBBI POST  
VIA VIDYANAGAR,  
BANGALORE 562134.  
TELEPHONE: BANGALUR 32.  
1ST JANUARY, 1976.

WE WISH ALL OUR READERS A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR.

The Editorial Office of the Newsletter has now been shifted to Bangalore. Will members please send their annual subscription of Rs.10/- by cheque, made out in the name of 'Zafar Futehally' or by M.O. to the following address:

Zafar Futehally  
Dodda Gubbi Post  
Via Vidyanagar,  
Bangalore 562134.

NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDPATCHERS

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Correspondence:

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BACK IN THE EDITORIAL CHAIR

In November 1973, when I moved to Bangalore from Bombay, I handed over charge of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers to Mr. S.V. Nilkanta. In spite of his busy schedule, and handicapped by being away from Bombay for several weeks in a month, Vasant carried on gallantly, but is unable to do so any longer. I have therefore offered to get back into the Editorial Chair of the Newsletter, and from January 1976 it will be edited and produced in Bangalore.

The fact that the Newsletter has survived for 15 years indicates that there is need for an effort of this kind, and there are a number of people in this country who have become sufficiently keen birdwatchers to demand its existence. I must confess that in the past I did not follow any clear editorial policy except the rather general one of encouraging birdwatching and the birdwatcher by accepting, more or less, any material that was offered. The result was that good, bad and indifferent articles all found their way in the pages of the Newsletter, and discriminating readers must sometimes have been put off by the somewhat inane reading matter which it contained. We hope to be a little more selective in future.

Since this is the only publication of the kind produced in India, I hope that serious ornithologists and active birdwatchers will play their part in building it up, and ensuring that it becomes a worthwhile medium of communication between persons interested in this subject. In course of time it can become a repository of valuable information about Indian Birds.

Z.F.

BIRD NOTES ON AN ENTOMOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO THE PINDARI  
GLACIER, KUMAON HIMALAYA

Kumar D. Ghorpade

During the year that I spent with the Zoology Department of Delhi University from September 1973 to September 1974, I had the thrilling experience of visiting several spots on the Himalaya, from Kashmir to Sikkim, besides the plains of Assam and the Khasi hills. These trips were made possible with the aid of a fellowship from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. For one who has lived most of his life near the Deccan, being conditioned to watching the bird fauna inhabiting the plains of southern India, an introduction to the ornithological treasures of the magnificent and awe-inspiring Himalayan ranges is unforgettable.

The first of these trips came in the shape of an entomological expedition to the Pindari Glacier in the Kumaon Himalaya, financed by the University of Delhi and led by Dr. V.K. Gupta of the Zoology Department. The team consisted of eight persons and we left Delhi on September 23, 1973 by jeep (with all our equipment and provisions in the trailer) for Ranikhet where we would halt for the night. At Ghaziabad, where we stopped for our morning tea and breakfast, I watched some Bank Mynas (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), with fledglings, coming for scraps of food, especially pieces of chapatties, near the tea shop. These ash-colored birds with yellow legs and bills and a striking naked reddish-orange eye patch appeared extremely bold to me.

After lunching at Ramnagar in the foothills, we drove past Mohan, in dense forest, where the late Jim Corbett shot the man-eating tiger of this name. The undergrowth in the forested foothills seemed now to consist mainly of the exotic Lantana bush. Bird life (as seen from the back of a moving jeep) was rather poor, and only the loosely-built Grey-winged Blackbird (*Turdus bouboul*) was frequently sighted on the roadsides. We reached Ranikhet (c. 7000') in the evening and booked into a lodge for the night. For one hour the next morning, before we resumed our journey, I managed to watch some birds, which are appended in the list. Only Briggs (1931, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., 34: 1072-1079) seems to have written on the birds of Ranikhet, from which hill station he recorded 83 species within a period of some 40 days, from April 30 to June 11. My own effort of identifying 26 species in an hour includes the following birds not listed by Briggs: Black Red Start, Rufous-backed Shrike, Rosefinch, White Wagtail, Large Pied Wagtail, Blue Rock Pigeon and the Spotted Munia. Most of these could be called 'low-elevation' birds, which fact tends to focus one's attention to a similar situation reported by Mr. Victor Smetacek (1974, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., 71: 299-302) around Nainital, a more popular hill station of the Kumaon area. While it is premature to attempt any explanation without



a proper investigation, one does get the impression that the tree cover of these hills has undergone denudation, with the possible result that it has affected the ecology of the area, opening up new niches suitable for these plains birds to move into, at least outside the winter months. This aspect does offer much interesting material for study and one hopes a few enthusiastic and knowledgeable birdwatchers staying on these hill resorts will try to gather some relevant information.

We resumed our journey from Ranikhet northward, going farther into the great Himalayan mountains and reached the charming village of Kousani (6200') where we lunched on the lawn of the strategically situated rest house, offering a most breathtaking view of the Snow Range, that is, on a clear day. The tolerably well maintained garden, with blooming roses, dahlias and cosmos attracted multicoloured butterflies and noisy bumblebees. Most noticeable were Painted Lady butterflies (Vanessa sp.) flitting gaily and sipping nectar. Moving on, we halted to pick up some hill potatoes at Bagushwar, and, since some of us could not resist the sight of 'Jilebis' being prepared right in front of us, soon we were busy stuffing these and washing them down with hot cups of tea. Our second night halt, Karkot (3500'), was reached in drizzling rain and this was the furthest the jeep could go. This village is located in an extensive valley where paddy, ragi, soyabean and a millet were growing, bounded on all sides by fairly bare hills with sparse coniferous forest on their tops. Contact was made with the Block Development Officer in whose car we were to leave the jeep and trailer and prepare ourselves for the 35 mile trek through the enchanting Pinder valley to the glacier which was our ultimate destination. We would be climbing throughout this distance, from a height of barely 3500 feet up to over 13000 feet, taking 12 days in all, with 1-2 day stops on the way at four P.W.D. rest houses, to enable us to collect the insects for which reason this expedition was organised. The return trip, walking downhill, would take us just three days with two night halts, that is, provided the rain gods cooperated with us and everything went according to schedule.

Next morning, we performed our ablutions beside the river Saryu, at the point where its tributary, the Kheerganga (so named, according to locals, because its waters taste like 'kheer') joins it. A beautiful White-capped Redstart was noticed perched on a stack of logs beside the river, and White and Large Pied Wagtails soon near the water's edge. I thought this redstart had the most eye-catching colour combination possible, with black back, wings and chest, chestnut belly and tail and a pretty snow-white cap. Add to this the sprightly nature of redstarts and you have quite the most enchanting little bird possible. This bird really won my admiration and throughout the trip I found myself looking forward to watching it again. Another bird that made its presence felt on the river's edge was the Large Pied Kingfisher, while around the village both Jungle and House Crows, Indian Myne and House Sparrows were abundantly evident.

Most of the day was utilized for collecting insects and the prize catch of the day was a single Oakleaf Butterfly (*Kallima inachus*), which I netted as it floated into me along a path in the forest. This rare butterfly, typical of the Oriental fauna, mimics dry oakleaves and once it settles on the ground in oak forest among the fallen dry leaves, it simply disappears from sight even though the observer may have consciously pinpointed the spot where it had settled! Late in the afternoon it started raining again and kept us indoors for the rest of the day. However we took the opportunity to engage a pack of mules belonging to a Bahadur Singh who would also serve as our guide. This was a giant of a man, with impressive mustaches and a much wrinkled, weatherbeaten countenance who was to help us negotiate the foot-track to the glacier for the next few days.

We started off on foot early the next day along with the pack of mules with our beddings, equipment and provisions laden on their backs and with Bahadur Singh spurring them on. From here upto Loharkhet which was our next stop, we walked amongst open fields and light coniferous forest along the ascending path which hugged the course of the river. I sighted a Plumbeous Redstart on some rocks in the river but besides this bird only Red Crowned Jays and Spotted Doves showed themselves on the way. Of course the ubiquitous House Sparrow occurred near every human habitation that we passed. I must make it clear here that even though the Himalaya supports a large variety of bird life, these are, for the most part, out of sight, and, unless one keeps his eyes and ears really wide open, he is bound to be disappointed with the avifauna here.

After spending a day at Loharkhet (5750'), we climbed some four thousand feet over a distance of five miles, covering just one mile in each hour, to Dhakuri Ridge (9600') and reached the rest house on the other side of the Ridge through Dhakuri Pass at noon. Bird life on the way through fairly dense and wet mixed forest with a lot of undergrowth and ferns both on the ground and on moss-covered tree trunks was disappointing, until we crossed a broad clearing in the forest where a pair of Dark Grey Bush Chats, with very prominent white chin patches were seen. At Dhakuri rest house (8600'), where we stayed two days, the Himalayan Greenfinch was the most obvious bird, besides single sightings of the Plainbacked Mountain Thrush, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Himalayan Tree Creeper, Spotted Forktail, Black Redstart, Himalayan Whistling Thrush, Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail and Rufous Turtle Dove. Apart from these, the Rosefinch, Spotted Dove, Red-crowned Jay, Jungle Crow and White Wagtail were observed around the rest house on both days. The Dhakuri Ridge is talked of as an ecological/physical barrier by some zoologists but apart from my observation that the House Crow, Whitecheeked and Redvented Bulbuls and the House Sparrow were not seen after Loharkhet, this ridge may not assume the role of a barrier in the case of birds.

The first of October saw us trekking downhill first and then uphill from Dhakuri to Khati (7200'), a small village with a population of approximately 200 people, the rest house located above the Pindar river flowing a few hundred feet below. It was at Khati that I saw the most number of bird species in a day and a half, most interesting being Spotted Forktail, Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, Himalayan Tree Pie, Himalayan Verditer Flycatcher, Lammergeier, Redbilled Blue Magpie, Pied Ground Thrush, Blacknaped Green Woodpecker, Streaked and Striated Laughing Thrushes, Blackcapped Sibia, Yellowbilled Blue Magpie and Himalayan Whistling Thrush. Right in front of the rest house I watched a mixed hunting party which consisted of Himalayan Tree Creeper, Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher, Greyheaded Flycatcher, Greenbacked Tit, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Yellowrumped Leaf Warbler, Greyfaced Leaf Warbler and the Yelloweyed Flycatcher-Warbler. These 'mixed hunting parties' are a phenomenon of the forest every bird-watcher must experience -- a symbiotic association of different species of birds, engaged in feverish activity, moving so rapidly through the foliage that once they have moved out of sight, you are left with the feeling that a 'minor tornado' has just passed your way!

We footed it to our next halt, Dwali (9000'), situated above a fork in the river Pindar, most of the time using the rough, stony river bed as a track, since the actual path was bad. It was here that I saw the magnificent, huge Himalayan Griffon Vultures, reputed to have the largest wing span among Indian birds, frequenting the rocky hills nearby. The Bearded Vulture or Lammergeier was also seen frequently. The only day we had planned to spend at Dwali collecting insects was a total washout, heavy rain keeping us indoors, inside our blankets and in front of a wood fire. Taking advantage of a slight break in the murky weather next morning, we started off for Phurkia (11,000') in biting cold through bamboo forest most of the way and had just reached the rest house when it started pouring again. Birdlife at Phurkia, which we experienced as an extremely cold and bleak place, was very poor, only the Bearded Vulture, Jungle Crow, Blue Chat and unidentifiable Swifts being seen. The next day again was all rain and no sun, which made us very dull boys indeed! It did cease for half an hour or so when we got out of the rest house and I got a glimpse of a flock of Snow Pigeons in the mist, which, I must say, is a most glorious sight!

As if aware of our planned schedule of going to the Glacier on Sunday 7 October, we were greeted in the morning with bright sunshine and an absolutely clear sky. The whole place was transformed from a bleak, cold place to a beautiful alpine country with snow peaks all around. The five mile trek to the glacier through open grassy meadows with the only trees in the initial portion being Rhododendrons, was exhilarating and when we did reach 'Zero Point', which is the farthest you can go towards the glacier, separated from you by a deep gorge where the Pindar river starts as a small trickle of water, it was rather an anticlimax since we could not actually set foot on the glacier. The weather was magnificent and

Bahadur Singh told us that it was said that only people who were not 'sinners' in the eyes of God were able to see the glacier in such fine sunshine. The only birds seen on the way were Redbilled Choughs uttering their weird calls, Snow Pigeons and a solitary Blue Chat sitting on a Rhododendron tree. We also passed a group of about ten horses left here to pass the summer and grow fat feeding on the luxuriant grass before being taken back by their masters to the plains in winter and put to work. Temporary loss of contact with humans had made these horses semi-feral and the way they pricked up their ears and formed a closer group as we passed them indicated this state. On the way back, after looking for insects under stones both lying scattered on the grass and in the bed of the small rivulet (the only likely spots for them to be found) Bahadur Singh showed us some aromatic plants (bushes) with reddish foliage, locally termed 'dhoop', growing here.

We returned to Kapkot walking the 35 mile distance back in three days with night halts at Phurkia, Khati and Loharkhet, picked up our jeep, paid Bahadur Singh and made it to Bageshwar by nightfall on October 10th. The following morning I saw Black Partridge, Small Blue Kingfisher and Swallow here, all these birds for the first time on the trip. Next day we reached Ranikhet and the following day visited Dunagiri (7700'), a hill nearby with a temple and apple orchards. We were back in Delhi for dinner the next day.

The expedition had been very interesting and successful from the point of view of our insect collection and I had managed to do some justice to my birdwatching, although it is very difficult to do both at the same time. I believe my foregoing account of the avifauna of this area, though sketchy, is the most exhaustive one yet attempted, though there is an article by W.H.O. Shortt (1925 J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., 30: 380-396) on a similar trek to the glacier (for shooting birds, not watching them) where he mentions seeing and shooting only Monal, 'Wood Partridges', Kalij Pheasant, Snow Pigeons, Black Partridge and Teal.

In the following table, I have listed all the birds identified on my trip to the glacier at each halt. An asterisk indicates positive and a dash indicates negative sighting of that bird in the particular place.

Legend: R = Ranikhet, 7000'

Ka = Kapkot, 3500'

Kh = Khati, 7200'

Pi = Pindari Glacier, 13,000'

Du = Dunagiri, 7700'

L = Loharkhet, 5750'

Dw = Dwoli, 9000'

B = Bageshwar, 3000'

Dh = Dhakuri, 8600'

Ph = Phurkia, 11,000'

\* = seen

- = not seen

| No. | Bird Species   | R | Du | B | Ko | L | Dh | Kh | Dw | Ph | Pi |
|-----|--|---|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1   | Pariah Kite<br><u>Milvus migrans</u>                         | * | *  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 2   | Himalayan Griffon Vulture<br><u>Gyps himalayensis</u>        | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | *  | -  | -  |
| 3   | Bearded Vulture<br><u>Gypaetus barbatus</u>                  | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | *  | *  | -  |
| 4   | Black Partridge<br><u>Francolinus francolinus</u>            | - | -  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 5   | Snow Pigeon<br><u>Columba leucanota</u>                      | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | *  | *  |
| 6   | Blue Rock Pigeon<br><u>Columba livia</u>                     | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 7   | Rufous Turtle Dove<br><u>Streptopelia orientalis</u>         | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 8   | Spotted Dove<br><u>Streptopelia chinensis</u>                | * | *  | * | *  | * | *  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 9   | Slatyheaded Parakeet<br><u>Psittacula himalayana</u>         | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 10  | Large Pied Kingfisher<br><u>Ceryle lugubris</u>              | - | -  | - | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 11  | Small Blue Kingfisher<br><u>Alcedo atthis</u>                | - | -  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 12  | Great Hill Barbet<br><u>Megalaima virens</u>                 | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 13  | Blacknaped Green Woodpecker<br><u>Picus canus</u>            | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 14  | Himalayan Pied Woodpecker<br><u>Dendrocopos himalayensis</u> | * | *  | * | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 15  | Swallow<br><u>Hirundo rustica</u>                            | - | -  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 16  | Rufousbacked Shrike<br><u>Lanius schach</u>                  | * | -  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 17  | Black Drongo<br><u>Dicrurus adsimilis</u>                    | * | *  | * | *  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 18  | Indian Myna<br><u>Acridotheres tristis</u>                   | * | *  | * | *  | * | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 19  | Redcrowned Jay<br><u>Garrulus glanarius</u>                  | * | *  | * | *  | * | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 20  | Yellowbilled Blue Magpie<br><u>Uropsitta flavirostris</u>    | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 21  | Redbilled Blue Magpie<br><u>Uropsitta erythrorhynchos</u>    | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 22  | Himalayan Tree Pie<br><u>Dendrocitta formosae</u>            | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |



| No. | Bird Species  | R | Du | B | Ka | L | Dh | Kh | Dw | Ph | Pi |
|-----|---|---|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 23  | Redbilled Chough<br><u>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</u>              | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | *  |
| 24  | House Crow<br><u>Corvus splendens</u>                           | * | *  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 25  | Jungle Crow<br><u>Corvus macrorhynchos</u>                      | * | *  | * | *  | * | *  | *  | *  | *  | -  |
| 26  | Whitecheeked Bulbul<br><u>Pycnonotus leucogenys</u>             | - | -  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 27  | Redvented Bulbul<br><u>Pycnonotus cafer</u>                     | * | *  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 28  | Striated Laughing-Thrush<br><u>Garrulax striatus</u>            | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 29  | Streaked Laughing-Thrush<br><u>Garrulax lineatus</u>            | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 30  | Blackcapped Sibia<br><u>Heterophasia capistrata</u>             | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 31  | Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher<br><u>Muscicapa superciliosa</u>    | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 32  | Himalayan Verditer Flycatcher<br><u>Muscicapa thalassina</u>    | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 33  | Greyheaded Flycatcher<br><u>Culicicapa ceylonensis</u>          | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 34  | Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher<br><u>Rhipidura hypoxantha</u> | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 35  | Tickell's Leaf Warbler<br><u>Phylloscopus affinis</u>           | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 36  | Yellowrumped Leaf Warbler<br><u>Phylloscopus proregulus</u>     | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 37  | Greyfaced Leaf Warbler<br><u>Phylloscopus maculipennis</u>      | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 38  | Yelloweyed Flycatcher Warbler<br><u>Seicercus burkii</u>        | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 39  | Blue Chat<br><u>Erithacus brunneus</u>                          | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | *  | *  |
| 40  | Black Redstart<br><u>Phoenicurus ochruros</u>                   | * | -  | * | -  | - | *  | *  | *  | -  | -  |
| 41  | Plumbeous Redstart<br><u>Rhyecornis fuliginosus</u>             | - | -  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 42  | Spotted Forktail<br><u>Enicurus maculatus</u>                   | * | -  | * | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 43  | Collared Bush Chat<br><u>Saxicola torquata</u>                  | * | *  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 44  | Pied Bush Chat<br><u>Saxicola caprata</u>                       | * | *  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 45  | Dark Grey Bush Chat<br><u>Saxicola ferrea</u>                   | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |



| No. | Bird Species   | R | Du | B | Ka | L | Dh | Kh | Dw | Ph | Pi |
|-----|--|---|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 46  | Whitecapped Redstart<br><u>Chaimarrornis leucocephalus</u> | - | -  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 47  | Himalayan Whistling Thrush<br><u>Myiophonus coeruleus</u>  | * | *  | * | *  | * | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 48  | Pied Ground Thrush<br><u>Zoothere wardii</u>               | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 49  | Plainbacked Mountain Thrush<br><u>Zoothere mollissima</u>  |   |    |   |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |
| 50  | Graywinged Blackbird<br><u>Turdus bouboul</u>              | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 51  | Grey Tit<br><u>Parus major</u>                             | * | -  | - | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 52  | Greenbacked Tit<br><u>Parus monticolus</u>                 | - | -  | - | -  | - | -  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 53  | Himalayan Tree Creeper<br><u>Certhia himalayana</u>        | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 54  | Gray Wagtail<br><u>Motacilla caspica</u>                   | - | -  | * | *  | - | *  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 55  | White Wagtail<br><u>Motacilla alba</u>                     | * | *  | * | *  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 56  | Large Pied Wagtail<br><u>Motacilla maderaspatensis</u>     | * | -  | * | *  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 57  | House Sparrow<br><u>Passer domesticus</u>                  | * | *  | * | *  | * | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 58  | Spotted Munia<br><u>Lonchura punctulata</u>                | * | -  | * | -  | - | -  | -  | -  | -  | -  |
| 59  | Himalayan Greenfinch<br><u>Carduelis spinoides</u>         | - | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |
| 60  | Rosefinch<br><u>Carpodacus erythrinus</u>                  | * | -  | - | -  | - | *  | *  | -  | -  | -  |

## THE SINGULARITY OF PLURALS

Glancing through an old Encyclopaedia in a friend's house I came across this list of words used to denote groups, as against single individuals of several kinds of birds. English is certainly a rich language, albeit a difficult one:

fall of woodcocks  
flight of doves or swallows  
murmuration of starlings  
building or clamour of rooks

covey of partridge  
 bevy of quails  
 host of sparrows  
 game of swans  
 charm of goldfinches  
 congregation of plovers  
 exaltation of larks  
 watch of nightingales  
 wisp of snipe  
 plump of moorhens  
 sege of herons  
 muster of peacocks  
 paddling of ducks  
 brood of chickens  
 tiding of magpies  
 skein of geese

And how should we describe a group of people talking noisily, and purporting to be watching birds. A clamour of birdwatcher?

Z.F.

#### WHITEWINGED WOOD DUCK (CAIRANA SCUTULATA)

In 1967 Mr. M.J.S. Mackenzie formulated a project for saving the White-winged Wood Duck both by preserving its habitat in Assam and by breeding the ducks in captivity in Gauhati Zoo and at the Wildfowl Trust in Slimbridge, England. Under the imaginative direction of Sir Peter Scott the captive group at Slimbridge is doing very well, and some 86 birds have been bred so far. This is a most encouraging development because it means that in the unfortunate event of the wild population of the Wood Duck in Assam getting dangerously depleted through habitat destruction, the captive birds could be introduced into a sanctuary area later on.

Mackenzie has pursued this project with commendable zeal and efficiency and in September 1975 he had the opportunity to visit again the areas in Assam where the birds were formerly reported to be well established. He suggests that the Duamare, Dohing East, Namphei, Tinkopani Reserve Forests as well as the Nam Dapha Sanctuary be established as a primary rain forest sanctuary for the White Winged Wood Duck and other forms of wildlife. He says quite rightly that the sanctuary area should not be chosen purely on behalf of the Wood Duck, but rather as a conservation area for as wide a spectrum of trees, plants, animal, birds and insects as may be protected in one area of Assam Plains Primary Rain Forest.

Recommendations of the type made by Mackenzie must be processed quickly because the character of even our Reserve Forests is changing rapidly, and unless these areas are given the status of a sanctuary their floristics might change so quickly that they will no longer be a suitable habitat for these birds. Perhaps Mackenzie's proposal can also be considered by the National Committee on Environmental Planning & Coordination who are proceeding to establish biosphere reserves in various parts of India, as recommended by UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Z.F.

#### CORRESPONDENCE:

You may be interested to know that our Birdwatchers Club of Indore has now formed itself as the Ornithological Society of Central India, one of the objects of which is to update the Bird Survey of Central India that was last conducted by Dr. Salim Ali in 1938-39. This is only a wish at the moment, but I would hope that with some funds becoming available we may be able to do something to update the list although not in the scientific and technical manner in which Dr. Salim Ali did it 37 years ago.

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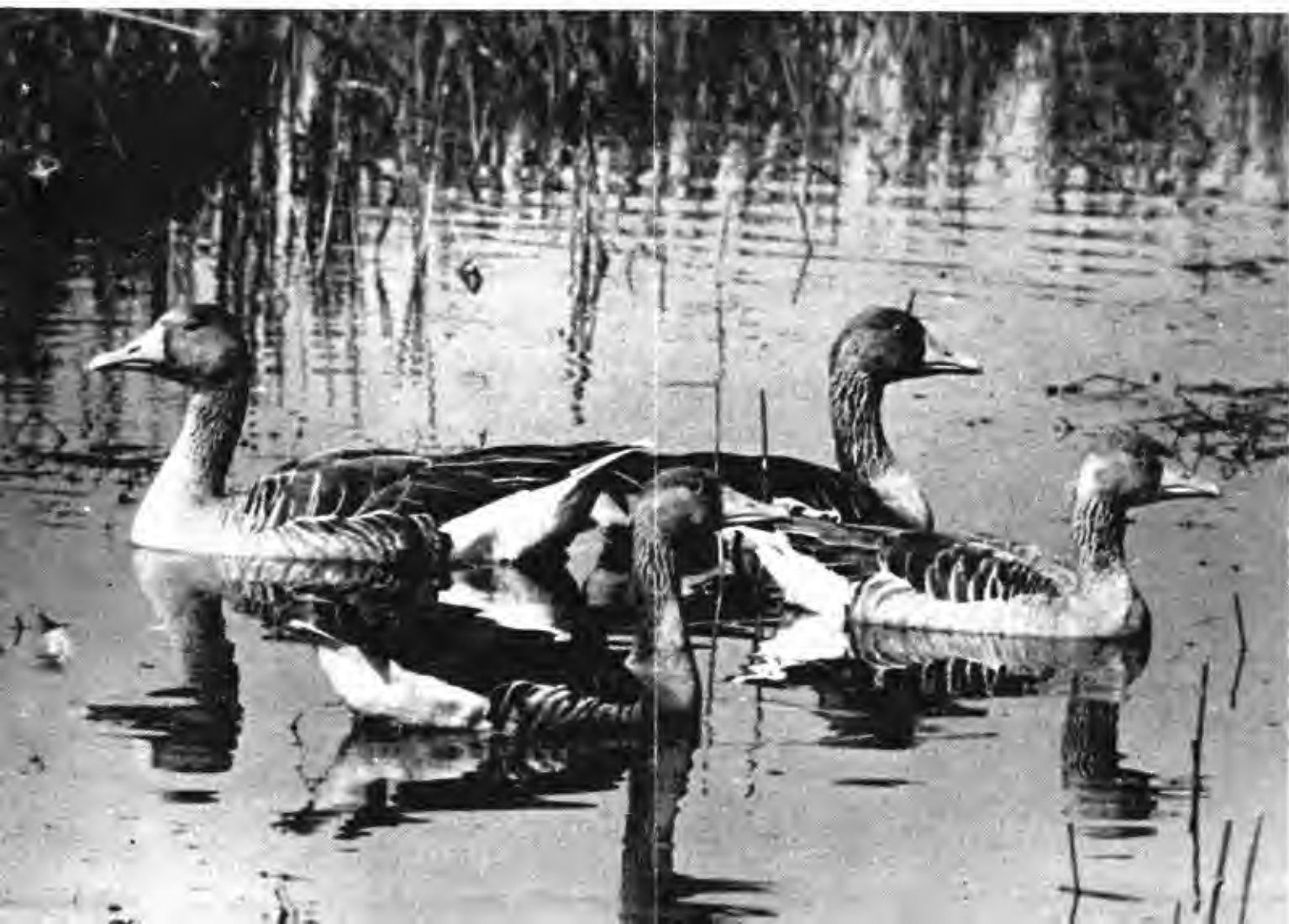
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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL XVI NO. 2 FEBRUARY 1976



NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 16, Number 2.

February 1976

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RANGANATHITTU BIRD SANCTUARY

S.G. Neginhal

It is May, and the summer is at its fag end. There have been some heavy premonsoon showers, and the farmers have set to ploughing their fields to take up paddy cultivation. Water has started flowing in the age old irrigation canals to facilitate the ryots to puddle the fields.

The waders and water birds, which were waiting for this season, have commenced collecting on the islets of the Cauvery River, at Ranganathittu, 16 kms from Mysore City. Soon, large mixed heronries spring up on all the host plants of the islets and the birds commence building nests assured of a good supply of food in the form of insects, earth-worms, crustaceans, molluscs, frogs in the surrounding puddle paddy fields and fish from the river. In addition the deep waters of the river offer natural protection and immunity from human molestation for the breeding birds.



It is very rare to come across mixed heronries of the type that we see at Ranganathittu, representing nine species of wading birds and four species of water birds as listed below:

1. Large Egret (*Egretta alba*) Local Name: Kokre or Bollakki
2. Median Egret (*E. intermedia*) Local name: Kokre
3. Little Egret (*E. garzetta*) Local name: Kokre
4. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) Local name: Kokre
5. Openbilled Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) Local name: Kangel Batu
6. White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephala*) Local name: Karitala Hakka
7. Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)
8. Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)
9. Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
10. Darter or Snake Bird (*Anhinga rufa*) Local name: Neer Koli
11. Large Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) Local name: Neer Batu
12. Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) Local name: Neer Kagi
13. Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)

Soon the birds commence acquiring their nuptial plumage. There is a change in the colour of the feathers and the beak. The snow-white Cattle Egret in its breeding plumage wears golden buff on its head, neck and back. The Large Egret develops lacelike plumes on the back and often keeps them erect and spread out in "showers". The Little Egret wears a drooping nuchal crest of two long thin plumes - known to the trade as "sigarettes". The Spoonbill puts on a long white, bushy nuchal crest. The Large Cormorant has some white on the head and neck, and the Shag has white feather tufts behind the eyes and white speckles on the head.

The birds are busily engaged in nest building in the months of May and June. These birds are no great architects. The nests are skimpy stick platforms lined with water weeds and leaves. They are built cheek by jowl - often many species nest together. There is however a tendency to segregate into discrete "Mohallas", as Dr. Salim Ali puts it. Usually both the sexes take part in nest building and care of the young.

The eggs are laid in June and July. For oologists, Ranganathittu is a veritable paradise. Thousands of eggs are available for close study by just stooping over the low built nests from the rowing boat or coracle provided by the Wild Life Department. The eggs are most colourful - varying from pale greenish blue to white. When the available nesting grounds are overcrowded with nests the late comers like the White Ibis build their nests on the ground.\*

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\* The statement by the author about nests being built on the ground needs to be checked as Stuart Baker in his *Nidification of the Birds of the Indian Empire* Vol.IV, page 436, does not refer to this. If anything the impression Stuart Baker gives is to the contrary for he says: "They often choose large trees to nest on while many other birds prefer lower ones closer to the level of the water." Ed.

August is the month when most of the eggs hatch and the nests are then teeming with nestlings. The parent birds are busy getting food from the just planted paddy fields, jheels and the river. It is a sight to see the birds making repeated sorties for feeding the voracious fledglings.

The fledglings demand food from the incoming parents by violently worrying them and by tickling their throats and beak. The nestlings of cormorants and darters beg food excitedly swaying their scrawny necks from side to side and tickling the bill of the parents to induce disgorgement. Impertunate chicks of egrets and white ibis insert their beaks into the parents' beaks and wrestle vigorously to pre-empt food. The fledglings of openbill storks stand in a semi-circle moving their heads up-and-down till the parents disgorge the food on to the floor of the nest.

The fledglings commence learning to fly by September-October. They are at first seen going from branch to branch and later from tree to tree. The grownups are seen to flock on the rocks projecting outside the river, when the water recedes in October.

When the fledglings become mature enough to take long distance flights the parents start pecking off and they leave the sanctuary by late October and November with their young ones.

During the rainy season on two or three occasions the islets on which the birds nest are inundated. These floods wash away the low-level nests along with the eggs and nestlings. After each flood and the resultant destruction the birds soon get busy in building new nests and raising new broods without lamenting over their fate.

The eggs and hatchlings suffer heavy depredations from crows, which infest the sanctuary during the breeding season. It is painful to see the birds looking on helplessly at the pilfering crows snatching away the eggs and nestlings. The Brahminy Kite is the other common predator and periodically Bonnet Monkeys swim over the islets and pillage the eggs.

When the waders and water birds leave the sanctuary with their broods, the sanctuary welcomes yet another series of interesting birds. These include the Great Stone Plover (*Egretta recurvirostris*), the Indian River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*), the Large Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), the Indian Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo fluviicola*), the Striated Weaver Birds (*Ploceus manyar*) and the Common Weaver Bird (*Ploceus philippinus*).

The characteristically "goggle" eyed great stone plovers with their up-turned black and yellow bill spend the day drowsing on the hot boulders jutting out in the river after the rains. On being disturbed the plovers fly away issuing forth wailing cries "-Kree-kree-kre-kre".

The graceful Indian river terns with orange yellow bill keep on restlessly flying up and down the placid waters of the Cauvery scanning it for fish. The weaver birds flock on the Palm and Acacia trees fringing the river and are busy weaving their retort shaped nests with a tubular entrance.

The cliff swallows build their mud nests on the big rocks projecting outside the river from November onwards and collect in hundreds for breeding.

The crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) is another interesting resident bird. The marsh crocodiles (*Crocodilus palustris*) crawling on to the exposed rocks of the river and basking in the sun provide an interesting sight in winter and summer. The sanctuary provides natural breeding conditions for the crocodiles on account of its deep waters and availability of food in the form of fish.

Otters are most entertaining when they roll and dive after fish. The famous but rare Mahseer (*Barbus tor*) fish is the prized occupant of the deep waters of this place. There are twelve other species of fish. Hence in addition to being a bird sanctuary this is also a fish sanctuary.

Flying Foxes are found roosting in hundreds during the day on the huge trees of the main island. At dusk these bats become suddenly active and start flying out towards their favourite orchards to feed on fruit.

#### COMMUNAL ROOSTING IN THE REDWHISKERED BULBUL

K.K. Neelakantan

At Parambikulam (Palghat District, Kerala), during the last week of July 1973, I noticed that large numbers of Redwhiskered Bulbuls assembled every evening at about 6.30 at certain places and indulged in a loud concert of chattering notes. One of their roosts was a low (30 feet), but thickly foliated, graft mango tree which stood, like a huge inverted basket, between two cottages occupied by Forest Range Officers. The birds arrived here in small flocks before dusk, set up a loud chatter which went on for 5 to 10 minutes, and then settled down for the night. Once they had fallen silent, no one could have guessed that there were 2 to 3 hundred bulbuls in that tree. The peculiar chatter was heard again for a short while early in the morning before the birds dispersed. A small party of 6 or 7 Orange Minivets arrived later than the bulbuls and shared the roost with them.

On the 15th of April, 1975, I noted that hundreds of bulbuls were still roosting on the same tree. On that occasion, however, no minivets were seen.

Since in the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan there is no hint of a tendency in this bulbul to roost in such large numbers, will readers who have noted this habit write to the Editor, giving details of place,

5.

time of the year, nature of the roost, approximate number of the birds, etc.?

Unlike bee-eaters and house sparrows, the bulbuls never flew out of the tree in false alarms before settling down.

#### OBSERVATIONS ON THE FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF CERTAIN BIRDS ON THE STANDING CROP OF JOWAR, SORGHUM VULGARE

A.P. Jain

During a recent visit to Malhargarh, Mandsaur District, Madhya Pradesh, I recorded observations on the feeding behaviour of several bird pests of the standing Jowar crop from 17.11.1973 to 22.11.1973. The birds of economic importance which came to my notice were the sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), the ring dove (*Streptopelia dussumieri*), the little brown dove (*S. senegalensis*), the rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), the blossom-headed parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), the house-crow (*Corvus splendens*) and the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*).

I found that the birds mostly fed on those parts of the cobs on which they could maintain their balance while pecking. As those parts of the cobs became grainless and the birds still attempted to peck at grains on other parts, their balance got disturbed and the birds shifted to other plants. This is true for all the birds mentioned above except the sparrows. The sparrows mostly feed on cobs which have already been visited by other birds possibly because it is easier to peck and pick loosened grain.

The frequency of grain picking from the standing cobs was highest for the dove followed by the myna, parrot and crow. An ocular estimation revealed that grain from about 15 per cent of the cobs were partly or wholly devoured by these birds.

The crows also fed on the pods of groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*) which were stocked for drying in the fields.

It was interesting to note that sparrows, while feeding, remained associated with many of the larger birds while the latter selected their own fields for feeding and usually no mixing of species occurred.

#### SEASONAL VARIATIONS IN THE OCCURRENCE OF NON-MIGRATORY BIRDS

K.K. Neelakantan

In the August-September (1975) issue of the Newsletter Br. Navarro commented most interestingly on seasonal differences in the bird-life of Susagowahatti. This helped to remind me of some of my experience at Parembikulam (Kerala State), a wildlife sanctuary.



In spite of the ravages caused by the building of a dam, by unfortunate land use policies and unprofitable teak plantation schemes, Parambikulam remains an interesting place for the birdwatcher. My first visit to this sanctuary was in July 1973, and the second in April 1975: the first during a lull in the monsoon and the other well before the onset of the rains.

In July 1973 one of the commonest and most noticeable of birds at Parambikulam was the Coorg wren warbler (*Prinia hudsonii*). Pairs and parties were everywhere, and almost all day some of them could be seen 'dancing' and singing on electric and telephone wires and other high exposed perches. But in April 1975 I met with the bird only once in the course of three days!

Another striking difference was in the number of green pigeons. During my first visit green pigeons (mostly of the grayfronted species) were noted as numerous. Early in the morning and late in the evening they could be seen basking in the sun on the topmost twigs of tall trees. They spent hours in a tree close to the Inspection Bungalow, quarrelling among themselves and with barbets, bulbuls and hornbills for the fruit. In April 1975 green pigeons were seldom seen though the Imperial pigeon (Jardon's) was often met with and appeared to be nesting.

Other birds noted as common and noisy in July 1973 but seldom seen or heard in April 1975 were the Bronzed Drongo and the Orange Minivet. During the first visit Malabar Grey Hornbills were found going about in parties of 4 to 6 whereas in April only single males were seen.

#### TRITE OBSERVATIONS

Zafar Futehally

The presence of predators and prey existing cheek by jowl is something which always causes amazement. The other day a number of spotted doves were preening themselves unconcernedly on a bouhinia tree while a shikra was perched just 3 feet below them on the same tree. The position of the doves was such that they probably felt 'on top', but could not the shikra have made a quick about-turn to attack these doves? Or was it that the doves knew that the shikra had fed on a sparrow, and was satiated for the day?

\* \* \* \* \*

Yesterday morning (14th January), as I was inspecting the coconut plants in our garden there was a heavy "thud" 10 feet from me, and I noticed that a dead mouse had been dropped by a Pariah Kite. The Kite was being hotly pursued by four others and a couple of house crows as well. I walked away 50 yards from the site so that I could observe further developments without disturbing the birds. The kite swooped 3 or 4 times on the mouse without succeeding in engaging it in its talons. The position of the house was

such that the kite could not make a long sweep, and had to rise abruptly as the house was in the way. What surprised me was that even the two house crows did not descend on the mouse after the kite gave up the attempt. Later on I hurled the dead mouse on to our lawn from where it was clearly visible to the several kites and crows that were around, but none of the birds came to pick up the dead animal. I wonder if any of our readers can offer an explanation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Identifying birds like Pipits, for example, merely from their form and colouration is difficult business. For many days I used to see pipits in the fields around our house without being able to decide what species they were. But, the Handbook came to my rescue. Thus The Handbook Volume IX page 24 says ".... moving its tail up and down in the manner of wagtails .... perches freely on bushes and tufts of grass ....." Armed with this information I went back to look at these birds, and it was then clear that they were Paddy-field Pipits (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*). Similarly the several wren warblers can be very confusing, and it is more by their habits than by their appearance that they can be identified. In the case of the Streaked Fantail Warbler (*Cisticola juncidis cursiveus*), Volume VIII of the Handbook page 34, says "feeds on or near the ground, seldom flitting about on the top of bushes or grass clumps in the manner of wren warblers". It may be useful if readers, when out birdwatching make on the spot notes of the mannerisms of different birds as a clue to identification.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### MUNIA AND WHITE-EYE RECORDS

T. Gay

During a five-week stay in lovely Kodaikanal, October-November 1975, I had hoped to enjoy a lot of bird-watching. The unaccustomed cold, however, and the mist and cloud and rain brought by the prolonged north-east monsoon, put a veritable damper on my hopes. Bird observations were few, and the only ones possibly worth reporting are these two:

(1) A pair of Spotted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) were seen on Coaker's Walk, busily diving into patches of coarse grass and perching on the dense *lantana* bushes. With their customary lack of shyness, they allowed me to observe them at close range. Salim Ali's Indian Hill Birds finds no place for any species of Munia; and since Coaker's Walk is well over 7000 ft above sea level, this observation may possibly constitute a "height record" for these little finches. Does any reader of the Newsletter know of a still higher record?



(2) In the pleasant grounds of the Carlton Hotel one could at any time find the pretty little White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosa*). Their numbers were sometimes fairly large, but I had no idea how large until one morning when I was able to count them as they flew, by ones and twos, from one tall ilex tree to another a few paces distant. I counted -- to my amazement -- no less than 67 White-eyes! The trickle of small green bird-lets seem as though it would never end. The Book of Indian Birds refers to "flocks of 5 to 20 or more", but has even Salim Bhai seen a flock of sixty-seven?

#### A PUNCHED CARD KEY TO THE DICOT FAMILIES OF SOUTH INDIA

Zafar Futehally

Fr. Cecil J. Saldanha of the St. Joseph's College, Bangalore, and Mr. C. Kamaeswara Rao of the Department of Botany, Bangalore University, have designed and produced a most useful Key for the identification of all the Families of South Indian plants. All the Dicot Plant Families are listed on each of a set of punched cards. A list of characters relating to the leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, perianth, indumentum, etc. is given. When a few of these are identified the relevant cards pertaining to these characters are placed one on top of the other. Holding up the cards against the light the identification is provided by the cut slot which is not blanked out. The several cards indicate by their slots all the Family characters by a particular trait.

This Key is available for Rs.35 from the Centre for Taxonomic Studies, St. Joseph's College, Bangalore 560 001. Perhaps some enterprising ornithologist will produce something similar for identifying the birds of a particular region.

#### RED-WATTLED LAPWING

V.S. Saxena

May I invite your attention to the note 'More about the nesting of the Red-Wattled Lapwing' by Thomas Gay in the Newsletter of April/May 1975? Shri Thomas Gay referred to the nesting of the Red-Wattled Lapwing in Kota in front of the Palace. I made enquiries with Shri Bhim Singhji (ex-ruler of Kota state) about this bird. In his reply dated 12th December 1975, Shri Singhji says: "The news about the Kotah Lapwing nesting on the lawns is correct. The bird did come till 1966 but after that I have not noticed her coming to that place for nesting again. I do not know where the bird has gone now".

There was also an interesting comment from Mr. N.K. Chakravarthy and Mr. P.M. Govindkrishnan, Bangalore (Newsletter of August/September 1975) about finding the nestlings of the Red-Wattled Lapwing in the low ground

in Bangalore and that against the apprehension of a drought, there was good rainfall in Bangalore this year. The site of nesting of Red-Wattled Lapwings is often linked with ensuing rainfall conditions in a particular year. The egg laying of this bird in the north is done in the premonsoon period and if the hatching of eggs is belated and if by intuition, it gets the idea that it is going to be a good rainfall year, it will avoid low lying areas. From the account of Sarva Shri Chakravarthy and Govindkrishnan it appears that chicks must have become large enough to fend for themselves before the low ground level was inundated. It is, however, a matter for further observation and study. Shri Dharmakumarsinhji (cf. Newsletter for February 1975 - Shri S.K. Reeves) has however, dismissed the dependability of this belief.

I may further quote a few instances. My friend Shri G.N. Pillai, Dy. Conservator of Forests, Udaipur told me that a pair of Red-Wattled Lapwings laid eggs on the roof of a small room in the annexe of his Bungalow at Udaipur in 1973 and as is well-known Udaipur had a devastating flood in 1973 and the area around the nesting site was submerged for a little while.

This year when I was on tour of Ranthambhor, Project Tiger Reserve, on 28th May, 1975, I saw a Red-Wattled Lapwing nesting on a katcha platform about a metre high from the general ground level, opposite the mosque in the fort. There were four eggs in the nest. I have been given to understand that the rains were quite good in the terrain in this year.

It can therefore be conjectured that the nesting and laying of eggs on higher ground than usual may have a bearing on good rainfall to follow. I do not have authentic information about the other aspect, i.e. that if eggs are laid in a depression it would imply a poor rainfall year. It would be desirable that more observations on this bird and its breeding behaviour are made in a scientific way so that the human race could profit by the indications, good or bad, birds give us.

#### THE SINGULARITY OF PLURALS

Amin Tyabji

I wish to augment your list of plurals with the following:

- A nye of pheasants
- A tribe of sparrows
- A rafter of turkeys
- A mustering of storks
- A chattering of starlings
- A convocation of eagles
- A team of ducks (on the wing)
- A band of jays
- A pack of grouse
- A colony of gulls

J.S. Serrao quotes from an article by George Reiger in International Wildlife Vol.5(3), May/June 1975:

"Once the English language was rich with arcane and colorful words for wildlife plurals, groupings and behaviour. For example a number of larks was an exaltation of larks. A group of teal was correctly called a spring of teal. We also find a charm of goldfinches, a murmuration of sterlings, a murder of crows, and unkindness of ravens, a parliament of rooks, a quarrel of sparrows, a fall of woodcocks, and a wisp of snipes. In fact, the word flock was generally reserved for domestic chickens and sheep, while flight most often applied to swallows and rock doves (common pigeons). A group of geese on the wing was referred to as a skein, while those on the ground were a gaggle. Grouse travelled in packs, partridges in coveys, and quail in beavies. A cock pheasant and his hens made up a nye nide; a family of turkeys was a dule or a rafter. Peacocks mustered. Plovers congregated. Bitterns came in sedges while herons appeared in seiges. A group of puddle ducks was described either as a padding - in the water - or as a leash or team waddling ashore. A cluster of diving ducks was a dopping or dropping, swans formed a hard or whiteness, and coots were a covert. "....." Today all birds flock, and most big mammals form herds."

As 'gaggle' refers to geese on the ground, as also a collection of ladies, may I suggest 'cackle' for noisy birdwatchers.

#### COMMENTS

Ghorpade's article on Bird Notes on an expedition to the Pindari brings back very old memories of when I first did this trip (as a boy scout) in 1912 - before World War I! - when jeeps, etc. and anything beyond bridle-paths were unknown.

F.C. Badhwar

May I be permitted to strike a personal note and say how grateful I am to Mr. Nilkanta for having so ably kept the Newsletter alive at a time, and for a period, when it might so easily have foundered. I have always greatly enjoyed the Newsletter and look forward eagerly to receiving my copy.

When a voluntary job requires to be done, it is not always easy to find volunteers. Despite his busy life, Mr. Nilkanta assumed the editorship of the Newsletter and kept the publication going, and for that we owe him a debt of gratitude.

At the same time, it is good to be able, since a change had perforce to be made, to welcome back our first editor and founder of the Newsletter: Mr. Zafar Futehally. May he have a long and successful tenure of the editorial chair.

Turning to the Newsletter itself, I fully agree with our new editor when he says that he feels sure that there is a need for a publication such as the Newsletter, and that the standard of the Newsletter should be raised, in the hope that it will be taken more seriously and become, as he says, "a repository of valuable information on Indian Birds".

To raise the standard of the Newsletter will, of course, take time and there are lots of suggestions which one could make as to how this could be done. In addition to the one which the editor himself makes, that is, of being more selective in the matter which is included in future, may I be permitted to make three fairly simple and obvious ones.

Firstly, the drafts of the Newsletter require checking carefully before re-production. With respect, they have hitherto contained far too many avoidable typographical errors.

Secondly, it should be a rule that the first time the vernacular (that is the trivial, common or popular) name of a bird is mentioned in a contribution, its zoological name should be given in brackets and that the sub-specific name should only be given if reference is being specifically made to the sub-species and is therefore really necessary. Here I would suggest that the zoological nomenclature to be used should be that adopted in the 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan' by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley. (All ten volumes of which have now been published, and as it is currently the standard work on Indian Birds, a copy of it would, I imagine, be in very library of any standing in India).

Thirdly, I think the Newsletter should be given a name. May I suggest "Sarus" as being the name of a very conspicuous and common Indian Bird.

S.K. Reeves

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Editor

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### WHERE IS JERDON'S COURSER? AN INQUIRY

Courser are ground-living birds, slightly smaller than the Grey Partridge. They inhabit open sandy or stony waste land, fallow cultivation, and thinscrub jungle. The Indian Courser (right) is common throughout the plains of India. Jerdon's, or the Doublebanded Courser (left) is so rare that it has not been reliably seen since the year 1900. It was then known only in the Godavari and Penner valleys in Andhra Pradesh—Nellore, Cuddapah, Sironcha, Bhadrachalam and Anantapur neighbourhoods—but may be found elsewhere. The double breast-band will readily distinguish it from the commoner Indian Courser.

If this bird is seen by you kindly report to your nearest forest official with particulars as to locality, date, and numbers seen. Forest or other Government officials, and shikaris and village headmen, are requested to kindly pass on this information to Bombay Natural History Society, Shaheed Bahgat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XVI NO. 3 MARCH 1976.



NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 16, Number 3.

March 1976

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SALIM ALI WINS THE J. PAUL GETTY WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PRIZE FOR 1975

Salim Ali's numerous friends in India and abroad are delighted with this award. In a Press Release on 2nd February, The World Wildlife Fund said:

"Dr. Ali, who lives in Bombay, will receive a prize of 50,000 dollars, awarded for outstanding achievement or service for the benefit of mankind in the conservation of wildlife, plant or animal. India's Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Triloki Nath Kaul, will receive the award on behalf of Dr. Ali in Washington on 19 February.

The prize, the largest ever for wildlife conservation, was first established by Mr. Getty in 1974 and awarded to Don Felipe Benavides of Peru. The selection is made by a 13-men jury of distinguished scientists and conservationists, presided over by H.R.H. The Prince of the Netherlands President of the World Wildlife Fund.

The award of the 1975 Getty Prize to Dr. Ali crowns a life-time's devoted work on India's rich birdlife, culminating in the monumental ten volume "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan", which he co-authored with Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

Dr. Ali was educated in Bombay and later studied in Berlin under Professor Erwin Stresemann.

He recalls that his interest in studying birds began when, as a boy, he shot a sparrow with a yellow throat which puzzled him. An uncle sent him to the Bombay Natural History Society, where he was shown their extensive collection and encouraged to start his own.

He had a brief spell in business but during the slump after the first World War his wife encouraged him to follow his consuming interest in birds. From then onwards he carried out detailed field studies in various parts of India, resulting in many scientific papers and books which are standard works. His zest for field studies has never ceased and to this day he undertakes expeditions to such places as the Himalayas and the remote salt marshes of the Rann of Kutch, where only a year ago he obtained the first solid evidence of the breeding in India of the Lesser flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*), hitherto known only in Africa.

Primarily interested in bird ecology, the science of how birds live and fit into their surroundings, Dr. Ali also led research into migration which has demonstrated the importance of the Indian sub-continent in world bird movements.

He was made a Member of Honour of the World Wildlife Fund in 1973, and among many other honours he has received the Padma Vibhushan, one of India's highest awards."

At the moment of writing (20-2-1976), Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley are searching for the Forest Spotted Owlet (*Athene blewitti*) in the Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra. This bird "effects heavy moist deciduous jungle and groves of wild mango; partial to the neighbourhood of streams". Less than a dozen specimens of this bird have been collected, and the last was by Meinertzhagen on the banks of the Tapti river in 1914.

Z.F.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BREEDING HABITS OF THE INDIAN  
JUNGLE NIGHTJAR (*CAPRIMULGUS INDICUS INDICUS*) IN KHANDALA

Dr. A. Navarro, S.J.

Nightjars, as their name suggests, belong to the "Birds of the Night". They do not breed in colonies, but nonetheless, in Khandala I found that they nest fairly close to one another. They like a patch of open ground either at the entrance of or right inside the forest. The eggs, since they use no nests, are always placed on bare ground or on stones.

Behind the Khandala Hotel and beyond the pipe-lines, there are stones which are left-overs of those used to build the tunnels through the Khandala Ghats. These patches of greyish ground are very attractive to the Nightjars as is evidenced by the fact that I have often found them nesting in such spots.

Some may find it difficult to observe a Nightjar at night, but it seems to me that it will be even more difficult to locate a Nightjar brooding over its eggs at day-time. They sit so still and steady as to be almost invisible to the human eye - a masterpiece of camouflage.

Two eggs are laid and their shape is elliptical. Their colour is pinkish or buff-red, with blotches, smears and spots of reddish-brown neutral tint and lavender. Among the several "nests" found at Khandala, I noticed that in each case the eggs were not of the same size.

On the trees, the Nightjars place themselves in a length-wise position pressed close to the branch. They blend as well with the pattern and colouration of the branch as of the ground so that obviously they are highly skilled in choosing the right spot for becoming invisible.

The Nightjars make their appearance at dusk. At first, a few calls are heard and these increase gradually. After a time, several males are heard calling from the trees, and apparently, they prefer the top-most of the branches.

This year, a pair of Nightjars selected a spot for their breeding near the fence of our villa. Every day at 7.15 p.m. the birds made their appearance, flying from one tree to another as if chasing each other. Then the male would sit on one of the tallest trees and start calling. The female would remain on the ground or on one of the lower branches of a nearby tree collecting insects. The call of the male was a fast, steady and monotonous repetition of tha-coo, tha-coo, tha-coo. (That is why the Katkaris onomatopoeically call it the Thacoo). Suddenly, it would change its call into a low guttural tune coo-coo, coo-coo, coo-coo, making the first coo slightly longer than the other, and then go back to its original call which was louder and more sonorous.



For several days, the call of the male went on throughout the night right up to 5 o'clock in the morning. My observations were more easily made since I could hear them calling from my room.

After watching the Nightjars for two or three days, we noticed that the male plays on the top of one of the tallest trees. After a long and noisy call, he plunges into the air with wings and tail fully expanded floating in the air and moving from right to left. This is the manner in which he approaches the waiting female. The male then flies up to the tree from where he started and repeats the display about four or five times. As the male goes to meet the female, he produces a sound or call quite different from the usual one. It is like the noise of a single low note produced by blowing in a hollow cane and constantly repeated. But it is so low that it can only be heard from quite close. The most curious thing was that we were watching this display from about 20 yards away from where the female was sitting and that went on for about three days after which the male called in his more usual fashion.

Outside of the breeding season, the calls are few and short at dusk, and even at night they are made after long intervals. During the breeding season, the calling seems to be influenced by the weather. I have noticed during this period that if there happens to be a storm in the middle of May, or if the temperature falls a few degrees, the Nightjar keeps more silent.

I was once trying to photograph a Nightjar sitting on its eggs. The bird became suspicious when I went too near and flew off from the eggs. I tried to follow its flight with binoculars but I suddenly lost sight of it. After a time, I noticed a shapeless and colourless object slowly moving towards the eggs, it sat on them still motionless as if it was part of the ground on which it sat. It was so nearly invisible that it would deceive even the most expert and skilful birdwatcher!

#### THE MALABAR GREY HORNBILL (TOKUS GRISEUS)

K.K. Neelakantan

In mid-April 1975, I was lucky enough to come across two occupied nests of the Malabar Grey Hornbill. One was in an ironwood tree (*Mesua ferrea*) standing in lush evergreen forest in the Kerian Shola at Top Slip (Tamil Nadu). Seeing a lone male hornbill sitting with a large, long-legged insect in its bill, I watched its movements and saw it flying to a large, wart-like knob some 50 feet up the thick trunk. There it passed on the food to a bird within a nest.

The next morning at about 11.15 we saw the male hornbill behaving like a drongo or a flycatcher - fluttering, swooping, turning half a somersault etc. - to catch some prey which it ultimately secured. The victim appeared to be a small reptile, most probably a draco or flying lizard. After beating the animal repeatedly on a branch, the hornbill made for its nest.



The other nest was discovered on the 16th of April at Parambikulam. It was in a large White Pine (*Vetteria indica*), at the end of a stout horizontal branch some 60 feet above the ground. Just above the knob in which was the entrance to the nest, there was a crooked branch which provided cover from above. As the branch was quite bare of foliage, the movements of the male could be watched very easily. I was able to watch this nest for four hours in two sessions. During this period the male came to the nest 4 times: at 10.20, 11.15, 16.36 and 18.00 hours. On each visit the male sat above the sealed-up entrance and fed its mate and/or young ones many times.

This feeding was an interesting process. Soon after alighting near the nest the hornbill would raise his head, tremble violently and fetch up a single berry. He would then lower his head, letting the berry roll down between his mandibles to the tip of the bill. Lowering his head still further, he would pass on the berry to one of the occupants of the nest. Slowly, but without any rest, he would repeat the process many times. From time to time he would also peck off something, presumably remnants of food, from the outside of the nest.

At 16.36 hours when the male came to the nest, my friend Sri Sathees Chandran Nair and I tried to count the number of berries delivered by the male. It wasn't at all easy to say whether food was actually passed on every time the male ratched and lowered his head. All we could do was to count the number of times he bent his head towards the slit. He did this 38 times within 3 minutes.

The male spent only 2 or 3 minutes at the nest per visit. We never saw anything suggestive of the preliminary tapping at the nest entrance mentioned in the HANDBOOK. It certainly is not a regular habit.

On the ground below the nest we saw a good number of green, starch-filled nuts, oval and about an inch in length. Some of these were whole, but most had been crushed or split open. All the food remnants seen under the tree were of the same kind. Around the base of the ironwood tree which held the other nest, we found no remnants of food. But the plants and the ground on one side were well bespattered with small quantities of the bird's excreta. This was full of very tiny cream-coloured seeds. Nothing like this was found below the White Pine nest.

I gathered the impression that when it has a nest, the Malabar Grey Hornbill is a very silent bird. One of the interesting things noted at the White Pine nest was that at dusk (6.26 p.m.) two Common Mynas, which till then had been noisily demonstrating at a huge monitor lizard (*Varanus*), flew to the hornbill's nest, clung to the lower edge, picked up something and flew to another tree close by. A minute or two later they again visited the nest and carried off something.

Some guesses based on the differences between the males' behaviour and on the evidence found beneath the nests are: (1) that the Ironwood nest contained only the female, and that she was given animal food at the rate, most probably, of one animal per visit, and (2) that the White Pine nest

held both the female and her brood, and that at that stage the food was predominantly vegetarian.

A question: Do the female and young regularly squirt their excrete through the narrow slit? Although I spent 4 hours at the White Pine nest and the conditions were ideal for close observation, I did not see any evidence of this habit.

#### ON MIXED SPECIES ASSEMBLAGES OF BIRDS

Madhav Gadgil

By and large, it is birds of the same feather that flock together. Bangalore has an admixture of house and jungle crows, and crows of both the species gather behind our kitchen to pick up scraps of food. But if one looks carefully, one sees them neatly segregated. There is a loose party of house crows, and a loose party of jungle crows, and they do not intermix. In our garden, the sunbirds and flowerpeckers and white-eyes are often attracted to the same flowering shrubs, but although they may mingle on the shrub for a little while, they always come and go their separate ways.

There are, however, three different contexts in which birds of different species seem to voluntarily come and stay in association. These are the mixed feeding flocks, mixed communal roasts and mixed heronries. All of these often lead to spectacular results. I had the opportunity last year to spend ten days on a natural history trek through the moist deciduous forests of Wynad region in Kerala, and what I was most struck by were the grand feeding parties of the insect-eating birds. A great variety of species joined to form the feeding parties: velvetfronted nuthatch, iora, scarlet minivets, goldfronted chloropsis, jungle myna, bronze drongo, and goldenbacked woodpecker were the most common participants. One could walk through the forest for a couple of miles without seeing more than one or two stray birds; and then all of a sudden a feeding party would come one's way, and the whole forest would come alive, for all the members of the large feeding party which may contain twenty to fifty birds, would be chattering simultaneously. These parties move at a deliberate pace, setting up a great racket, and undoubtedly flushing up a nice crop of insects. This crop they harvest in their own peculiar ways, chloropsis from the leaves, woodpeckers from the trunks, drongos sallying after them in the air and so on. And then, once this party has passed on, the forest would remain silent and till another half hour later, one encountered the next feeding party.

All these species do occur in the dry deciduous forest of Bandipur as well, where I spend a lot of my time. But at Bandipur, they all feed by themselves, never forming a mixed feeding party. What is it then that causes them to congregate as soon as the forest becomes a little lusher and moister?

One may occasionally see mixed feeding flocks outside the lush forest, but they certainly do not seem to have the same splendour. There was, for example, a stray rosy pastor whom I had got to know in 1972 in Poona, who had decided that it was really an Indian Myna, and who always fed and roosted along with Mynas.

Although mixed feeding flocks seem to be a special feature of the lush forest, mixed roosting is quite common, everywhere. There is a *Spathodea* tree on our Institute campus in Bangalore on which roost about eighty brahminy and ten Indian mynas every night. But this mixed roosting, and the mixed heronries, such as that of Ranganathittu described in the February issue, are a subject in themselves to which I would like to return some other time.

#### STRAY THOUGHTS OF A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER

E. Hanumantha Rao, AFIAP

The landscape photographer or portrait photographer can choose his setting, and may to some extent plan his picture and arrange his apparatus, shutter speed, critical aperture and other related paraphernalia. In contrast, when a rare bird, or a common bird in a rare stance, is the subject, the photographer has to shelve all his formulery, his sole concern being not to miss the rare specimen. To the photographer's frequent chagrin, birds have the tendency to make themselves scarce when approached. The slightest noise, from the camera or its wielder, scares away the bird; hence the first rule of bird photography: the farther you are from the subject, the greater the possibility of photographing it. Birds, unfortunately possess extraordinary eyesight and power of hearing.

Even the commonest of birds, like mynahs and partridges, are thus not easy to photograph. After two decades of active photography, I find that photographing even an ordinary house sparrow is quite tricky!

Wildlife photography can be attempted only when one has achieved considerable expertise in handling the camera. Despite the sophisticated equipment available at present, unless one is confident of the precise results of the selected shutter speed - be it a thousandth or a two-thousandth of a second - and the proper f-stop to accompany it - and unless one is free from physical sway and such other concomitants which attend the shooting process, one cannot hope for success in bird photography.

The other and major pre-requisite for a bird photographer is complete familiarity with the habits and temperaments of the birds he intends to photograph. He should be able to identify and interpret bird voices; he should be able to locate deceptively hidden eggs. There is no short-cut to such familiarity: the only way of acquiring it is by intense and arduous study and observation. Study of the relevant literature and actual bird-watching thus precede bird photography.

Before I took to nature photography as my chief hobby, nearly twenty years ago, I had consumed considerable literature on the subject. I had closely read such works as Oates and Blandford's Fauna of British India, Salim Ali's Book of Indian Birds, Joseph Hickey's Guide to Birdwatching, and books by T.C. Jerdon, James Fisher, Hugh Whistler, Stuart Smith and others. It is but a short step from study to birdwatching, and likewise from birdwatching to bird photography.

I enjoyed watching the birds, for its own sake, for the fascination it provided, even when I had not thought of eventually photographing them so extensively as I happened to do. When I began to watch birds, - first in my immediate vicinity and then in the outskirts, gardens and paddy fields, - it no longer surprised me that many distinguished persons of pre-independent India, like A.O. Hume (founder of the Indian National Congress), Stuart Baker and numerous others made birdwatching their chief pastime. It is the devoted labours of these savants that laid the foundations of ornithology and bird study in India.

My study helped me identify the various bird species, get to know their nesting, breeding and migratory habits, and familiarise myself with their daily ways and movements.

I have spent hours, indeed days, watching the daily routine of animals and birds, and have felt amply rewarded even when not a single photograph was possible. To watch a bird or animal in its natural habitat affords us unique joy. To disturb the birds for the sake of photography is not only self-defeating but also vandalism of a kind. The bird photographer, even when he is stationed hundreds of feet away from the subject, takes the utmost care not to disturb the environs, to the point of avoiding even coughing, footstep noises and rustle of clothes.

While birdwatching is a pleasure by itself, bird photography multiplies that pleasure a hundredfold. Advanced photographers often construct 'hides' in the vicinity of bird nests to enable them to watch the course of daily life of birds and also to take photographs when opportunity affords. Attracting birds by providing special feeding facilities may often pay dividends.

Intending bird photographers may start with a mere single-lens-reflex camera with a medium tele lens of say, 200-300 mm, which will meet most of their ordinary needs. As one advances, one may acquire and employ additional equipment. The mechanics of bird photography, such as selection of shutter speed, film, etc., will form the subject of our next article.



THE ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA AND  
ITS CURRENT ORNITHOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

Subhendu Sekhar Saha

At its inception in 1916, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), inherited the immensely valuable treasure of zoological collections from the Indian Museum which itself likewise inherited those of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

During the second World War, the ZSI was shifted to Banaras where it was housed in a building on the bank of the Varuna River. An unprecedented flood of that little river in 1943 caused great damage to the collections. Part of it was washed away, and a part remained submerged under water for three days before it could be salvaged. In 1948, the ZSI was brought back to Calcutta. Since then rebuilding the collections through frequent and extensive faunistic surveys has been a major activity of the ZSI. Its bird section has also been doing the same.

At present, ZSI has the following programmes of ornithological work in hand:

1. Birds of Bhutan: Since 1966, ZSI, Bombay Natural History Society and the Smithsonian Institution carried out a number of avifaunistic surveys in Bhutan. About half of the total material collected by the three institutions has been entrusted to ZSI and the other half to SI for working out. The actual working out has been completed and the report is now being finalized.
2. Birds of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands: This report is being based on a large collection made on these islands by various ZSI parties during the last 20 years or so. A number of additions and alterations are expected in this report from other recently published ones.
3. Avifauna of Orissa: Since 1970, ZSI has undertaken a thorough faunistic survey, districtwise, of Orissa. Working out of the avifaunal collection so far made has already started. The programme will, however, continue for some more years.
4. Birds of Goa: This faunistically little-known territory is being extensively surveyed since 1968 and is likely to continue for a year or two more. The collection of birds already made is being worked out.
5. Birds of Calcutta and its environs: Except for the stray collections made by the pioneers of ornithology during the 18th and 19th centuries, and short reports published in 1843-44, and again in 1916, there is no comprehensive report on the birds of this area. ZSI, therefore, undertook a long-term project of studying, ringing and collecting birds in and around Calcutta in 1962. The accumulated collection and ringing data are now being worked out in the form of an avifaunistic report.



6. Ethology of the Common Daya, with special reference to their economic role in agriculture: The Common Daya has been branded as a pest of the cereal crops. Mammoth flocks of bayas inhabit the vast stretches of paddy-fields in the eastern part of the country. The present study undertaken two years ago, is an attempt to evaluate the damage caused by this bird to the crops and its economic bearing on agriculture.

7. Catalogues of the collections of the bird families Alcedinidae and Picidae: The catalogues of collections of birds belonging to the above mentioned families incorporated in the National Zoological collection of India, preserved in ZSI are being prepared for publication.

8. Bird ringing in Calcutta and its neighbourhood: Since 1962, ZSI has been ringing birds, in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society, in this area, and very interesting recovery data have already been obtained. Since 1975, ZSI has been ringing mostly ducks at the Alipore Zoological Garden, Calcutta, and interesting results are expected.

9. Status-survey of the Large Whistling Teal: Of late it has been noticed that this bird has become scarce and that it has vanished from many areas of the country, where it was common even ten years ago. ZSI has therefore undertaken to conduct a status-survey of the species in various parts of the country. During 1975, various parts of West Bengal and Assam were visited for this purpose, but the results so far obtained are not very encouraging.

10. Birds of Bengal: Since no comprehensive list of the birds of Bengal is available, ZSI has undertaken to prepare one on the basis of published works and existing collections in various museums.

#### DHARATPUR BIRD SANCTUARY

The Posts and Telegraph Department of the Government of India released a postage stamp of 25 paise on 10-2-1976 depicting Painted Storks in Dharatpur. The official announcement said:

"Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary, Dharatpur, Rajasthan is one of the most spectacular water-bird sanctuaries in the world and offers a magnificent display of indigenous breeding birds and winter migrants.

The sub-tropical climate in the sanctuary together with its extensive aquatic vegetation and profusion of trees provide ideal conditions for nesting. Soon after the south-west monsoon, Indian water-birds like cormorants, darters (snake-birds), spoonbills, white ibises, egrets, the grey heron, the painted stork, the openbilled stork begin to nest usually in congested, mixed colonies, on trees partly submerged in water. The nesting colonies are mainly sited in the hundreds of acacia (babul) trees that dot the marsh.

By the time the north-east monsoon and the winter arrive, these birds have raised several broods and generally reached the end of their strenuous breeding enterprise. They are now free to fly over to feeding grounds close by or far away.

In winter, migratory birds arrive from regions as distant as Russia (Siberia) and northern Europe by November. The magnificent Siberian crane and a variety of duck, geese, sandpipers, plovers and others descend in vast numbers on the large, shallow sheets of water in Ghana and spend a few months around these feeding grounds, wintering with us. They return to their homes in the cold north by the end of February.

Some indigenous water-birds that have completed their breeding enterprise elsewhere in India also migrate to the Ghana Sanctuary. For instance, among the three kinds of pelicans found in the sanctuary in December, the rosy and the Dalmatian pelicans are migrants from outside the country, but the third, the grey pelican, breeds in India itself. The indigenous birds commence their nesting enterprise by mid-September and depart by about March.

In view of the wide range and the large number of water-birds found in the Ghana Bird Sanctuary, the well-known National Audubon Society of U.S.A. has chosen this Sanctuary to hold its Ecology Workshop from February 9 to 11, 1976.

The P & T Department is happy to bring out a special postage stamp on the Ghana Bird Sanctuary, Dharatpur to mark the occasion."

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### RED-WATTLED LAPWING

Peter Jackson

I have been meaning to write to you for a long time as I wanted to add something to the debate on the Red-wattled Lapwing.

In Delhi the Lapwings nested in a number of the large gardens of "old" New Delhi, and probably more often than realised on the flat roofs of houses. The one I remember particularly built a nest first of all on the roof of the residence of Mr. Malcolm Macdonald, then British High Commissioner. But it gave up, probably because of the preparations for a party to celebrate the Queen's birthday, which involved flags and other disturbing things. Mr. Macdonald located what he believed to be the same pair nesting on the roof of the nearby Defence Ministry block soon afterwards. I was keen to photograph them, and after Mr. Macdonald had obtained clearance from Mr. Krishna Menon, then Defence Minister, I climbed a rickety ladder to the roof and set up my hide. It was May and getting quite hot. Usually

## ATTENTION READERS

Our target for 1976 is 500 subscribers.  
Can you help by enrolling a few in  
April?

*Editor*

the British Ornithologists' Union. I therefore append below the definition it gives of a Noun of Assembly and the comments it makes on Nouns of Assembly relating to groups of birds:

"Assembly, Noun of: a collective noun for a number of birds (or other animals) of one kind together; some of these words are of general application, while others have restricted meanings. The usual term for an assemblage of birds is 'flock'; sometimes 'flight' if they are on the wing; sometimes 'party' if the number is quite small. Other ordinary English words can of course be used for descriptive purposes in appropriate circumstances, e.g. 'assemblage', 'congregation', 'multitude', 'horde', 'host', and (on the water) 'raft'. The word 'brood' is used for the chicks or nestlings hatched from a 'clutch' or 'set' of eggs laid by one hen bird for simultaneous incubation. Birds breeding gregariously are referred to as a 'colony'. 'Pair' means a male and a female, presumably united. 'Drace' means two birds, usually dead - a measure used in counting the Sportsman's 'bag'.

Then there are the special nouns of assembly which it is correct, or supposedly correct, to apply to particular kinds of birds in preference to the more general term, and only to such kinds. Some of these are genuine items from the vocabulary of medieval venery, whether now obsolete or still to some extent current (mainly among sportsmen). Others are mere inventions of later pedantry. Others again are erroneous, having found their way into the category by misconception. No attempt at an exhaustive list need be made here.

The word 'covey' is used for a family party or similarly sized flock of partridge or grouse, and is perhaps the only one of these special words that has any wide currency in English as spoken in Great Britain at the present day. There are some people, however, who would always be careful to speak of a 'gaggle' or (if flying) 'skein' of geese, a 'pack' (bigger than a covey) of grouse, a 'wisp' of snipe, or a 'spring' of teal. On the other hand, one would be only half serious in speaking of a 'murder' of crows, a 'charm' of goldfinches, a 'watch' of nightingales, a 'nye' (various spellings) or pheasants, a 'clattering' of choughs, a 'covert' of coots, a 'siege' of herons or bitterns, a 'fall' of woodcock, a 'herd' of cranes, curlew, or swans, a 'trip' of dotterel, a 'bevy' of quail, a 'chattering' or 'murmuration' of starlings, or a 'dissimulation' of small birds.

There are a few specific terms for colonies, according to the kind of bird concerned. 'Brookery' and 'heronry' are of the best usage, and the former has been adopted also for penguins (Spheniscidae) by ornithologists in the Antarctic. Others are easily invented, where euphony, permits, and some have wide currency - 'gullery', 'ternery', 'swannery', but 'loomery' (guillemots) is a more sophisticated usage. These inventions are not free from affectation, however, and the general term 'colony' is usually to be preferred."

## WHITE IBIS BREEDING ON GROUND

Madhav Gadgil

I very much enjoyed reading Shri Neginhal's article on the birds breeding at Ranganathittu in the February issue of the Newsletter. The editor points out that the observation of white ibis breeding on the ground is a novel one, and needs confirmation. When Dr. V.S. Vijayan of the Bombay Natural History Society led a bird ringing team at Ranganathittu in last August, he too was struck by this unusual behaviour. The team consisting, besides Dr. Vijayan, of Shri H.C. Shatchandra, Shri R. Gadagkar, Dr. V.N. Vasanthrajan and myself have observed this ground nesting of white ibis, and we also have good photographic record of the phenomenon. Shri Neginhal was of course with us at that time also. There is therefore no doubt of the authenticity of Shri Neginhal's record, and he must get the credit for recording this unusual nesting behaviour for the first time.

(Shri Neginhal has sent me a photograph of the nests of the White Ibis on the ground, so this finding must be accepted. Ed.)

## RANGANATHITTU BIRD SANCTUARY

J.S. Serrao

Mr. S.G. Neginhal's article [Newsletter 16(2): 1-4; 1976] gives the impression that the Large Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) to be a common feature of the Sanctuary. As far as I am aware of the status of this teal which is common in Assam, Bengal and Bangladesh, it is found sporadically in peninsular India as far south as Madras, and as a rare stray in Sri Lanka.

In our own times Dr. Salim Ali did not come across it during the Mysore Bird Survey and cites a single specimen in Col. Phythian-Adams's collection which the latter collected from a small flock on the Kabani river during 14 seasons of duck-shooting in Mysore. Neither William Davison nor C.J.W. Taylor record the bird for that part of Mysore they individually worked in 1883 and 1887 respectively. Bombay Natural History Society's collection has a single specimen procured from the Calcutta bird market, and Maharashtra has but a single sight record by Mr. Humayun Abdulali from Powai, Bombay, made on 17.vi.1958 (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 56: 358-9).

Mr. Neginhal's list is conspicuous for the omission of the Lesser Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*) therefrom, which is recorded by Dr. Salim Ali from near Hampapura (with ducklings, 21.xii.1932), at Gundalpet (13.xii.1936), on a Cauvery island above Seringapatam (a nest, 15.viii.1938) and Dandipur (an adult with chicks, 19.xi.1938). The Cauvery island referred to by Dr. Salim Ali is perhaps what now forms the Ranganathittu sanctuary. Because of the fact that field differentiation between the Large and Lesser Whistling teal is relative, and owing to paucity of records of the Large bird from peninsular India, a confirmation of Mr. Neginhal's record is desirable.



The Newsletter for Birdwatchers will certainly form an important source of reference to the student of birds in India in the years to come, and the attempts made to check, re-check and check again any seemingly odd record is well worth the trouble.

#### ONSET OF "BRAIN-FEVER"

T. Gay

At 0630 hours on 7 February I heard the call of the Brain-fever Bird (*Cuculus varius*) and since I sleep lightly and wake early, I can state with assurance that this was the first Brain-fever call, this year, on this western edge of Poona. The experience set me wondering how early in the year the Hawk-cuckoo normally begins to advertise itself. Salim Ali's "becomes increasingly obstreperous with the advance of the hot weather" does not offer any definite date. Whistler is equally indefinite with his "is most vociferous from early spring into the rains", and he further says that "the call is uttered at any time of the year."

If any of my fellow readers has kept records of either (1) calling in the cold season, or (2) earliest call in the calendar year, would he be kind enough to share his knowledge with the rest of us?

.....

I should like to associate myself, if I may, with all that S.K. Reeves has written in the Feb issue. His suggested name of "SARUS" for the Newsletter is a good one. (Did he feel just a tiny temptation to propose "RUFF"?)

#### BIRDS OF PINDARI HILLS

S.R. Shah

I have a feeling that readers of Newsletter may be unduly disheartened if they do not see even one fourth of the birds seen by Shri Ghorpade (Volume 16 No.1, Jan.1976). On the same trek (in early May) I had seen only 11 out of the 60 birds listed (Nos.1, 16,17,18,20,24, 25, 27,30,40, 41,46 plus a monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*), a brown dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*), a Kashmir dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*), a cuckoo and a couple of unidentified birds).

Maybe I do not possess the same degree of the art of spotting and keenness of eye-sight as Shri Ghorpade. I have not yet seen Nos.5, 10, 13, 22, 25, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 44, 45, 48, 50, and 53 during more than a dozen (full October) treks in Himalayas. For seeing so few birds, I thought, the birds had migrated to lower altitudes or plains.

A novice may take heart from my case.

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Peter Jackson, formerly principal representative of Reuters in New Delhi, is now the Director of Information, World Wildlife Fund, 1110, Morges, Switzerland. He is also a first-class photographer.

Mr. S.K. Reeves knows India well, and is now settled in England.

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Mr. S.R. Shah, A-20 Shakti Sadan, Lamington Road, Bombay 400 007, is a keen young birdwatcher who has done much trekking in the Himalayas with his parents.

Prof. Madhav Gadgil is now attached to the Center for Theoretical Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He is a Ph.D. (Biol.) from Harvard University. He is currently engaged in the study of the ecology of the Bandipur National Park, and is also undertaking a survey of the elephant population in southern India.

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Zafer Futehally,  
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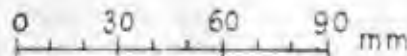


Rare



Common

Jerdon's or  
Doublebanded Courser



Indian Courser

### WHERE IS JERDON'S COURSER? AN INQUIRY

Courser are ground-living birds, slightly smaller than the Grey Partridge. They inhabit open sandy or stony waste land, fallow cultivation, and thinscrub jungle. The Indian Courser (right) is common throughout the plains of India. Jerdon's, or the Doublebanded Courser (left) is so rare that it has not been reliably seen since the year 1900. It was then known only in the Godavari and Penner valleys in Andhra Pradesh—Nellore, Cuddapah, Sironcha, Bhadrachalam and Anantapur neighbourhoods—but may be found elsewhere. The double breast-band will readily distinguish it from the commoner Indian Courser.

If this bird is seen by you kindly report to your nearest forest official with particulars as to locality, date, and numbers seen. Forest or other Government officials, and shikaris and village headmen, are requested to kindly pass on this information to Bombay Natural History Society, Shaheed Bahgat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

**Editor: Zafar Futehally.**

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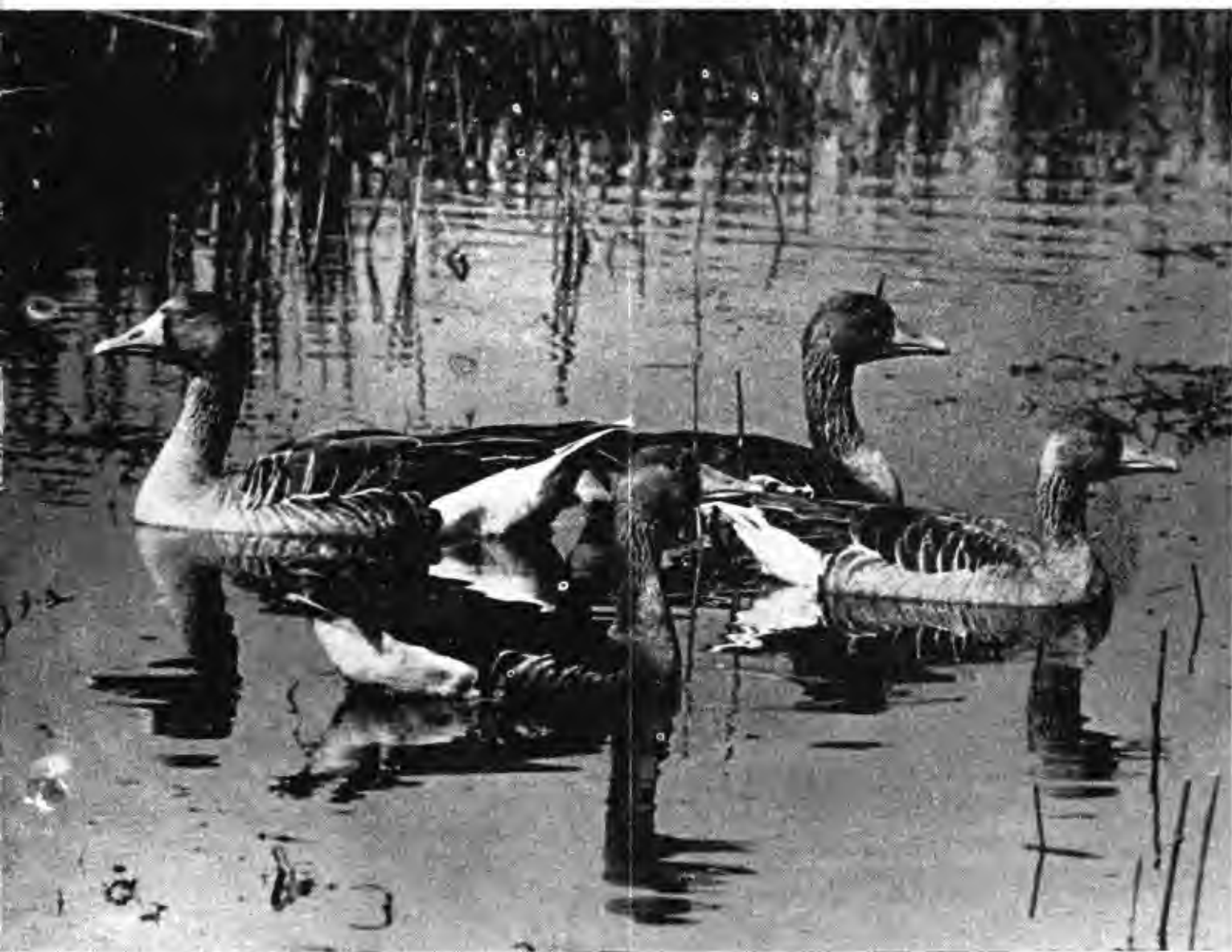
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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR  
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INCIDENCE OF BIRD PESTS IN SUNFLOWER AND EXTENT OF LOSS CAUSED

Mir Hamid Ali, B.H. Krishnamurthy Rao, N. Shivnarayan,  
Aziz Banu and M. Anand Rao

Abstract

Studies on the bird pest of sunflower were carried out in the experimental plots at the Agricultural College Farm. The observations on the bird visitants were taken on the standing crop of sunflower from seed setting to harvest stage. For the calculation of the extent of damage, a known area was covered with a nylon agricultural netting and an equivalent area was exposed for bird damage. Parakeets caused heavy damage to sunflower crop in the absence of scaring. Though House Sparrows and Munias visited the crop, they did not appear to feed on the sunflower seeds. The loss in sunflower seeds due to bird damage was found to be 94.5% (kharif 1974) and 96.09% (rabi 1974-75) respectively.

Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) is an important oilseed crop in India, and is extensively cultivated in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu and Uttar Pradesh. Like any other crops, sunflower is also subject to attack by a number of pests. The most important of these are reported to be birds which are said to cause appreciable loss. However, no detailed and authentic information is available in the published literature on these bird pests and the extent and nature of damage caused by birds in this crop. Hurt (1944) reported that in Britain, pigeons, rooks and finches feed on sunflower seeds but similar observation on the bird pests of sunflower does not appear to have been made in our country. Unless the loss suffered by the crop in question due to bird damage is determined in quantitative terms, the magnitude of the pest problem and the consequent need to arrest these losses will not be clearly understood. Hence studies to determine the most destructive bird species of sunflower and the extent of damage caused by them were taken up in A.P. Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, and the results obtained are presented here.

### Materials and Methods

Studies on sunflower (Var.EC 68415) were conducted in the experimental plots of the Agricultural College Farm, Rajendranagar. For observations on the birds infesting sunflower and to study the extent of damage, two plots each measuring 20M x 32M were selected. An area of 12M x 32M was demarcated in one of these plots and the crop therein was protected from bird damage by covering with a nylon net. An equivalent area of crop in the adjoining plot was left fully exposed for the bird damage.

Observations on the bird visitants on sunflower were taken in the morning from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and in the evening from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. The data were recorded on the standing crop from seed setting to harvest stage.

For calculation of percentage loss caused due to damage by birds, 25 randomly selected 'heads' were taken from the standing crop from protected and exposed areas at the time of harvest and the number and the weight of well-formed and ill-formed seeds in each of the 25 'heads' in the two treatments (protected and exposed) were recorded.

### Results and Discussion

Data recorded on the bird visitants have shown that Roseringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) of the *Psittacidae* family is the most dominant visitant in sunflower crop. A survey made for the bird pests of sunflower in cultivators' fields also revealed that the parakeets are the only bird species damaging the crop. Besides Parakeets, House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and Munias (*Lonchura* spp) made occasional visits to the crop, but they did not feed on the sunflower seeds. Presumably the short beaks of the latter birds are not strong enough to pick the seed out from the receptacle. Though the natural food of these birds have been reported by Salim Ali and Ripley (1969, 1972, 1974), there is no mention of sunflower in this list. Studying the feeding habits of the Roseringed Parakeet at Punjab, Simwat and

Sidhu (1973) reported sunflower as a major food source to these birds. The incidence of bird infestation started when the crop reached the seed formation stage and continued till the harvest of the crop. Hurt (1944) reported damage to sunflower at seed and seedling stages by Partridges and Pheasants. He observed that these birds while taking the seed break off small stems and thus ruin the plants. In the present study, no bird was found picking up the seed sown or damaging the seedling. In the absence of scaring parakeets were found to invade the sunflower crop at heading stage in flocks and feed voraciously on sunflower seeds. Feeding by parakeets was confined to early morning (6 a.m to 8 a.m.) and evening (4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) hours mainly. The seriousness and magnitude of damage caused by parakeets under unprotected conditions existing in most of the farmers fields can be judged from the data given below:

The parakeets removed the seeds from the receptacle of the head and fed on the tender cotyledons by removing the seed coat. Apart from feeding on seeds, the parakeets also damaged a major part of the receptacle and removed the ray florets of the inflorescence. In doing so, the parakeets also interfere with the pollination and seed setting as the ray florets by virtue of their conspicuous bright yellow colour are a source of attraction for the pollination of the crop.

Data on the loss caused by parakeets in sunflower in the studies conducted in kharif 1974 and rabi 1975 are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Percentage of loss in Sunflower seeds due to bird damage during kharif and rabi 1974-75

| S.No. Particulars                                     | <u>Treatments</u>  |                   |                   |                   |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|   | <u>Kharif 1974</u> |                   | <u>Rabi 1975</u>  |                   |
|   | Protected          | Exposed           | Protected         | Exposed           |
| 1. Number of well formed seeds in 25 heads            | 15238<br>(Av: 610) | 842<br>(Av:33.68) | 8882<br>(Av: 355) | 354<br>(Av:14.16) |
| 2. Average percentage of well formed seeds in an head | 82.09%             | -                 | 85.75%            | -                 |
| 3. Percentage loss of well formed seed                | -                  | 94.5              | -                 | 96.09             |



Table 2. Loss in weight of seeds and yield in sunflower crop due to bird damage during Kharif and Rabi 1974-75

| S.No. | Particulars                                   | T r e a t m e n t s       |                        |                           |                        |
|-------|---|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
|       |   | Kharif 1974               |                        | Rabi 1975                 |                        |
|       |   | Protected                 | Exposed                | Protected                 | Exposed                |
| 1.    | Weight of well formed seed in 25 heads.       | 771.00gms<br>(Av:30.84gm) | 45.12gm<br>(Av:1.81gm) | 507.21 gm<br>(Av:20.29gm) | 25.59gm<br>(Av:1.02gm) |
| 2.    | Percentage loss in weight of well-formed seed | --                        | 94.2%                  | --                        | 95.0%                  |
| 3.    | Yield of sunflower/hectare                    | 542.0 kg.                 | 12.5 kg.               | 291.67 kg.                | 5.83 kg.               |
| 4.    | Percentage loss in yield                      | --                        | 97.7%                  | --                        | 98.0%                  |

A sunflower head consists mostly of well-formed seeds (82.09% to 85.75% of the total number of seeds) and a small percentage of ill-formed seeds. The birds cause appreciable damage to the well-formed seeds and the loss due to the bird pests' feeding was 94.5% in kharif and 96.05% in rabi thereby showing that the loss in two seasons was more or less uniform. Consequently, the weight of well-formed seeds (from 25 heads) in the exposed area was reduced to 45.12 gms (kharif) and 25.59 gms (rabi) as against 771.0 gms and 507.21 gms respectively in the protected area. Due to the devastating damage by birds and consequent loss in weight of seeds, the loss in yield in sunflower was as high as 98.0%. Despite the fact that the above figures of yield losses are on the extremely high side, it proves beyond doubt the importance of parakeets as recognised pests of sunflower in Hyderabad region and hence warrant effective measures to prevent the loss being caused by them.

#### Acknowledgements

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## A COMPARISON OF THE BIRDLIFE OF KECHKI AND HORHAP IN BIHAR

Jamal Ara

Quite small ecological difference between habitats result in substantial variations in the avifauna of the localities concerned. Over many years I have had the opportunity to observe the birds of Kechki and Horhap, two areas within my ambit from Ranchi, and the differences in the birdlife in these places have surprised me. Kechki Reserve is a small isolated forest in the Palamau District. It is 5 sq. miles in area, and is 171 kms to the northwest of Ranchi. I had written about Horhap in Vol.XI No.11 of November 1971.

The forest at Kechki occupies a wide triangle with the Aurenga and Koel rivers as the sides and a high ridge at the base. The ridge is of lime stone and the Koel cuts through it in a series of rapids. The soil is a light porous type, inclined to be sandy but richer than the soil at Horhap. Because of the gentler slope there is less erosion in evidence, and there is a more even flow with very little bare rocky outcrops.

Kechki and Horhap, come within Champion's major type group 3B- Northern Tropical Moist Deciduous Forest. The sub-type is C1-Moist sal forest. The predominant tree is sal (*Shorea robusta*), which does better at Kechki than at Horhap, but that is due more to the soil than climatic reasons. The other trees are also more numerous and do better than at Horhap. Lantana is frequent all over the Ranchi Plateau, and hence in Horhap, but comparatively scarce in the valley of the North Koel which occupies southern Palamau and in Kechki Lantana is very nearly absent. Loranthus is more frequently met here.

Kechki is a well watered area. The two rivers on the sides are large and perennial, but the nullahs within the forest are merely monsoon water courses. It has an area of 453 acres (181.2 Hectares) of which 376 acres (150.4 hectares) are a mixture of poor sal and miscellaneous, and 77 acres (30.8 hectares) are unproductive, comprising river beds, nullahs and rocky outcrops. The miscellaneous species are: *Terminalia tomentosa* - Asan, *Bombax malebaricum* - Simal, *Adina cordifolia* - Karam, *Schleichera trijuga* - Kusum, *Anogeissus latifolia* - Dhaura, *Roswellia serrata* - Salai. A marked difference from Horhap is the presence of bamboos (*Dendrocalamus strictus*), *Holoptelea integrifolia* - Chilbil, and *Acacia catechu* - Khair, all in commercial quantities. Kechki is much more bushy. It has very little paddy cultivation and only isolated fields of pulses, which abound in Quails and Partridges.

Geologically Kechki is on soil formed mainly by the weathering of gneisses where there is sal, and amphibolite where there is miscellaneous.

During the course of my investigations, I have identified and listed 130 species of birds in Kechki. A comparative study of the avifauna of Horhap and Kechki had been done, and as far as breeding birds are concerned the following list will indicate the difference:

Breeding birds of Kechki

1. Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)
2. Whitenecked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*)
3. Adjutant (*Leptoptilos dubius*)
4. Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)
5. Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*)
6. Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*)
7. Pallas's Fishing Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*)
8. Black Vulture (*Torgos calvus*)
9. Black Partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*)
10. Red Jungle Fowl (*Gallus gallus*)
11. Common Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
12. Button Quail (*Turnix tanki*)
13. Indian River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*)
14. Blackbellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*)
15. Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)
16. House Swift (*Apus affinis*)
17. Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*)
18. Eastern Skylark (*Alenda gulgula*)
19. Wiretailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)
20. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*)
21. Pied Flycatcher Shrike (*Hemipus picatus*)
22. Redcapped Babbler (*Timalia pileata*)
23. Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*)
24. Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)
25. Plain Longtail Warbler (*Prinia subflava*)
26. Ashy Longtail Warbler (*Prinia socialis*)
27. Jungle Longtail Warbler (*Prinia sylvatica*)
28. Pied Bush Chat (*Saxicola caprata*)
29. Grey Tit (*Parus major*)
30. Baya (*Ploceus philippinus*)
31. Whitebacked Munia (*Lonchura striata*)

Breeding Birds of Horhap

1. Indian Longbilled Vulture (*Gyps indicus*)
2. Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*)
3. Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*)
4. Fulvousbreasted Pied Woodpecker
5. Baybacked Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)
6. Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*)
7. Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*)
8. Orangeheaded Ground Thrush
9. Chestnut bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*)
10. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

With regard to the winter visitors also there are some differences which can be seen from the following list:

Kechki

1. Brahminy Duck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)
2. Common Teal (*Anas crecca*)
3. Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)
4. Fantail Snipe (*Capella gallinago*)
5. Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)
6. Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher
7. Grayheaded Flycatcher (*Culicibapa ceylonensis*)
8. Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*)
9. Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*)
10. Little Bunting

Horhap

1. Blacknaped Oriole
2. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Muscicapa tickelliae*)
3. Dull Green Leaf Warbler
4. Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)

Of the resident birds there are 31 species which are found at Kechki, but are absent from Horhap. There are on the other hand, 10 breeding species which occur at Horhap but were not seen at Kechki. Of the 31 species of Kechki unrepresented at Horhap the two terns and two storks can be ascribed to the presence of two big rivers in the former place. In the same category can be placed the Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) and the Pallas's Fishing Eagle, (*Haliastur leucorhynchus*). The other three birds of prey might be attributed to the more level country at Kechki. The Black Vulture (*Torgos calvus*) has its corresponding representative in the Indian Longbilled Vulture (*Gyps indicus*), though the absence of the latter from Kechki is not understandable.

The presence of long tailed birds like the Paradise Flycatcher and the Racket Tailed Drongo at Kechki may be due to the heavier forest cover there. In the same category is the Hornbill.

9 other species have been seen in the neighbourhood of Horhap and so their absence from the Reserve may be considered a local accident. The three game birds are absent from the Ranchi plateau to which Horhap belongs, because of the destruction of forests and shooting. That leaves 7 species at Kechki and 9 at Horhap which are more or less exclusive to the two regions. This can be attributed to the difference of flora, climate and topography.

The 10 species visiting Kechki in the cold weather are not seen at Horhap. Similarly the 4 Horhap species were absent from Kechki.

The presence of the five water birds, duck, teal, ringed plover, snipe and stint) at Kechki is due to the rivers which are shallow during the winter, have extensive stretches of sand and are practically ringed in by forests. The village too, is far away. On the other hand, none of



the Horhap species include any water birds, because the formation of the large stream here is not of the type which water birds like, and the one sandy patch is a regular thoroughfare.

#### FIELD OUTING TO HEBBAL LAKE, BANGALORE.

Abraham Verghese

Readers of the Newsletter would be glad to know that a Birdwatchers Field Club has been in existence in Bangalore since the last three years. Initiated by Dr. Joseph George in February, 1972, and ably assisted by Dr. V.J. Victor, this group has conducted many outings to various places in and around Bangalore. The activities of the group are restricted only to identification and listing of species in different spots in and around Bangalore. Efforts to count birds and determine the density of urban species are under progress. Such outings also serve as a get-together for birdwatchers to come closer and exchange their ideas and views. Besides, they help a great deal to stimulate interest in neophytes, and create in them an awareness of their surroundings.

On the 12th morning of April, 1975, a party of nine birdwatchers armed with five binoculars set out to Hebbal Lake with the main intention of seeing some of our migrants, before they clear-off, and other marsh birds. Birding lasted for over three hours, which began at 6.30 a.m.

On the swampy area near the water-front was found a bird of prey, whose size was that of a Pariah Kite crouching slyly, as though ready to pounce on a small group of Little Stints (*Calidris minutus*) which were feeding only a few yards away. Dark brown in colour, whitish (rather buffish) cap on the head, with whitish near shoulder, gave away its identity as Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). A group of Blackwinged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) probably disturbed by the Harrier were uttering continuously an alarm jek jek jek jek, while flying low in irregular circles over the water. These stilts are abundant in Bangalore and in general throughout Karnataka in winter.

Four Pheasant-tailed Jacanas (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) resident marsh birds, were seen feeding among the water hyacinths (*Eichhornia* sp.) The absence of the sickle shaped 'Pheasant' tail suggested that this was their non-breeding season. All the four birds appeared to be immature in that they were duller and lacked the golden yellow on the hindneck. However one of them appeared to have a little of the 'Pheasant' tail with slight yellowish hindneck. In flight they displayed a prominent white of the wing along with black tips. Mr. Futehally was heard explaining about the polyandry existing in these birds, and how the male alone has to carry out all the domestic chores.

On the far side of the lake flocks of Bluewinged Teal, or more popularly known as the Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) were seen. These probably are the most common of the migratory ducks visiting Bangalore. Though a good



table bird and affords plenty of sport, no shooting or gunners have been reported in Hebbal.

The Indian Small Skylark (*Alauda gulgula*) seemed to like the damp and marshy habitat around the lake. One of the birds exhibited a spectacular vertical flight which left us all gazing upwards only to find a 'speck' disappearing into the blues, but its clear warbling notes could be heard far below. On the same habitat were found feeding the Indian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) and Blackheaded Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava melanogrisea*).

A large flock of Brownheaded Gulls (*Larus brunnicephalus*) which are abundant in Bangalore in the months of March and April, was seen flying over the water at a low altitude. Their full coffee-brown head showed that these birds were in their summer plumage. There were no Blackheaded Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) as all the birds had the white mirror on black wing tip (first primary), which chiefly distinguishes *brunnicephalus* from *ridibundus*.

A complete list of all the birds seen in and around the lake on 12th morning is given: Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*), Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Bluewinged Teal (*Anas querquedula*), Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*), Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), Indian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Coot (*Fulica atra*), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*), Spotted Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*), Little Stint (*Calidris minutus*), Brownheaded Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*), Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Roseringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), House Swift (*Apus affinis*), Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Small Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Small Green Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*), Crimsonbreasted Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Ashycrowned Finch Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*), Indian Small Skylark (*Alauda gulgula*), Singing Bush Lark (*Mirafra cantillans*), Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), Tailor Bird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Indian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*), Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

#### ON THE PAUCITY OF SUNBIRDS AT BANDIPUR

Madhav Gadgil and H.C. Sharatchandra

We were at the Bandipur Wild Life Sanctuary for a few days in the last week of February, exactly a month after our trip to Nagerhole. Both these sanctuaries lie in the southwestern region of Karnataka and are only about fifty kilometres apart. Teak is the dominant species in both the forests, though Nagerhole has denser and more luxuriant growth due to a heavier rainfall. We were naturally interested in comparing the

bird faunas of the two areas and were struck by the near-absence of sunbirds and flowerpeckers at Bandipur, while these were plentiful at Nagerhole. The reason for this must lie in the paucity of the semi-parasitic flowering plants of genera *Viscum* and *Loranthus* at Bandipur. At Nagerhole these are abundant, and sunbirds and flowerpeckers appeared for most of the time to be associated with these parasites. It is well known since the pioneering studies of Dr. Salim Ali that these parasites depend on sunbirds and flowerpeckers both for pollination and seed dispersal. It would then appear that the parasites in turn provide the major source of sustenance for the birds and in their absence the populations of these flower-birds decline drastically.

This gives rise to another problem that of explaining the scarcity of the parasitic flowering plants at Bandipur. We take it that the explanation lies in the much greater diversity of tree species at Bandipur. Nagerhole has been managed for over a century to produce solid stands of teak - in other words, a monoculture. It is a well known ecological dictum that monocultures are much more susceptible to attacks of parasites and pests than biological communities with a diversity of species. Nagerhole and Bandipur seem to provide a beautiful illustration of this.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### WHERE HAVE THE WAGTAILS GONE?

M.A. Partha Sarathy

A couple of years ago, soon after Zafar Futehally 'migrated' to Bangalore he discovered an area in "Palace Orchards" which many wagtails seemed to frequent for their daily bath. These were some wet marshy puddles in a depression in the ground next to Sankey lake. It was delightful to see batch after batch of wagtails arrive at this spot and, - in a friendly fashion without quarrelling or interfering with each other - take their bath, groom themselves, chat for a while, and then fly away.

To get a close look, Zafar set up a small 'hide' made of used carton paper and bamboo poles. Through this hide my son and I got a very close look at the wagtails and took some pictures. My son brought some of his friends and they planned to set up a regular wagtail watching group. One boy lent his binoculars. We were able to observe the direction from which the wagtails arrived in the early afternoon and the direction towards which they all flew away in the evening. This was particularly interesting because we could then establish a regular route for these wagtails, learn about their habits, and hopefully track them to their nocturnal resting place.

Now, alas, it seems this little "Wagtail Sanctuary" in Palace Orchards is gone, - and so are the wagtails, naturally. Construction has begun where the "sanctuary" was and the wagtails have naturally foresaken us. One cannot help thinking that with increasing pressure to convert such areas into building sites we are likely to lose more and more of the delight of

having greenery and birds in our midst. One would wish that future laws would incorporate devices which would prevent the destruction of some of these existing wooded areas, marshes, streams, ponds and lakes in Bangalore.

#### THE DECLINE OF RAPTORS

K.S. Lavkumar

While we are rightly concerned about the low level of numbers of many of our larger mammals and birds, very few, if any at all, are realising that a more wholesale extinction is awaiting myriads of lesser creatures. Of late, I have noticed a very marked decline in the numbers of all raptors. Formerly, almost every alternate telegraph pole provided a vantage point for a Kestrel, white-eyed Buzzard or Lesser Falcon, while any journey of length would provide a couple of Eagles of one species or another. On an extensive two day drive through Thana District north of Bombay and a drive to Ajanta and Ellora provided me with one Hobby in the Thana Dist., and one Shikra in Aurangabad! I saw not a single Harrier, numbers of which should have been quartering the plateau country of Marathwada.

The decline as I can see it is a result of many factors. The total destruction of plant cover over almost the entire Deccan plateau has made the area unfit for the rich life it previously supported, indiscriminate use of insecticides has effected the breeding rate of raptors and very important for our breeding Eagles and Falcons, the felling of trees has reduced breeding places.

Sanctuaries and National Parks must provide the last refuge of not only the larger and more spectacular species, but also act as treasure houses of all forms of indigenous life. Alongside stringent measures to preserve these haven's, conservation practices must be enforced over the rest of the country. How is it possible to sustain a high human population when smaller life forms are unable to exist.

#### COMMUNAL ROOSTING OF REDWHISKERED BULBULS

G. De

This is with reference to the observation and enquiry of Prof. Neelakantan about the communal roosting of Redwhiskered Bulbuls in the forest of Kerala.

On 26.1.1976 at 7-20 a.m. I noticed a large number of these Bulbuls on the top of a mango tree near Powai Lake and within the next 7 minutes about 50 birds flew away eastward hopping to trees or dropping on the nearby reeds. I strained my eyes to be sure that those birds were really Redwhiskered Bulbuls and not some others. In the course of the next 10 days, on another mango tree, about one furlong west of the previous location, I found that before sunset some of these Bulbuls gathered and chattered for a while before proceeding further west. The maximum number, counted on these occasions was about 20. So it became evident that I was observing a phenomenon of communal roosting.

However, the importance of this observation was felt only with the arrival of the February issue of the Newsletter, containing the query of Prof. Neelakantan. Then I started looking for the roosting spot of the flock and could make the final observations ultimately on 22.2.1976.

On 22.2.1976 at 7.15 a.m. about 50 birds passed through this area. During the afternoon the chattering was heard at 6.15 only and within the next 7 minutes 53 birds entered the roosting ground either diving from neighbouring trees or flying out from the reeds. After a brief silence the chattering was resumed and by 6-30, 15 more birds entered the roosting ground. The chattering continued from the trees and in this interval 7 birds came out of roost to join with the group. Then at 6-40 15 birds in one group dived into the roosting ground.

It must be noted that the earlier entries into the roosting ground was in ones, twos or threes - majority being in twos. Quite likely, it means that the birds are already paired.

Finding now complete silence and the sun having already set at 6-35 (the day was at 7.15), I left the place. But at 6-45 at 200 ft. east of the spot I found 2-3 more pair, heading for west.

#### ROOSTING BEHAVIOUR OF TAILOR BIRDS

H.P. Harchekar

At about 5-40 p.m. on 10th January 1976, in Dabhil, Ambere Taluka, Retnagiri, we heard a concert of Tailor birds which continued for about 10 minutes. Then they flew to a Sapota tree, and the chorus stopped immediately. This was at 6.05 p.m. After about a hour and half we looked for these birds with a torch, and we found 4 Tailor birds sitting in a compact row with bills tucked in the wing coverts. We could not trace the other birds in the tree.

(Ashy Wren Warblers and Tailor birds have an amazing capacity to "bell up" together while roosting. I once followed a group of Wren Warbler at roosting time, and when they were "in bed" it was difficult to believe that the inmates consisted of birds. The group just looked like a ball of wool on the branch. Ed.)

#### AT HOME

May I suggest the inclusion of a third feature, apart from our Contributors and Our Subscribers, which might perhaps be called 'At Home'. It would run something like this: The undermentioned subscribers extend a cordial welcome in their homes to any fellow subscriber visiting the village/town/city concerned:

1. Name and address
2. Days and Times
3. Hospitality offered



In my own case, I would like to say that I would welcome birdwatchers on any day except Tuesday; preferred time 1600 onwards; light refreshments offered.

T. Gay  
Dev Kunj  
Prabhat Road,  
Poona 411004.

#### ACCOMMODATION FOR BIRDWATCHERS AT GUNA

I would like to say that I have excellent facilities for birdwatchers. I can accommodate them for any length of time as paying guests, and they will be charged very reasonably. The situation of this village is ideal for wildlife. It is 45 miles from Guna Rly. Station, and there is a daily bus service right to the fort. Round about there is thick impenetrable jungle. A perpetual stream runs under the Fort, suitable for bathing, fishing, etc. Most of the birds come for a drink and often settle down in the huge old trees on the banks, and in the shrubs on its bank. The terms will be sent to anyone on hearing about his requirements. A hut can be made on the bank of the river if required. Besides every other facility can be arranged on the basis of out of pocket expenses. Simple life can be enjoyed here. There is no contamination of air or water. It is miles away from congestion, noise and dirty air. Panther, Sambar, Spotted Deer, etc. are found in the jungle. No shooting is allowed, and they can be photographed easily.

If you publish this in the Newsletter, it is possible that someone may respond.

Rana Nahar Singh, P.O. Parone,  
Dist. Guna, M.P.

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

We acknowledge receipt of subscriptions/donations from:

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**INTERLINKS**  
**(Mysore) Pvt. Ltd.**

**BANGALORE**

PLEASE REPORT TO NEAREST  
FOREST OFFICER IF YOU SEE  
THIS BIRD



#### WHERE IS JERDON'S COURSER? AN INQUIRY

Courser are ground-living birds, slightly smaller than the Grey Partridge. They inhabit open sandy or stony waste land, fallow cultivation, and thinscrub jungle. The Indian Courser (right) is common throughout the plains of India. Jerdon's, or the Doublebanded Courser (left) is so rare that it has not been realiably seen since the year 1900. It was then known only in the Godavari and Penner valleys in Andhra Pradesh—Nellore, Cuddapah, Sironcha, Bhadrachalam and Anantapur neighbourhoods—but may be found elsewhere. The double breast-band will readily distinguish it from the commoner Indian Courser.

If this bird is seen by you kindly report to your nearest forest official with particulars as to locality, date, and numbers seen. Forest or other Government officials, and shikaris and village headmen are requested to kindly pass on this information to Bombay Natural History Society, Shaheed Bahgat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

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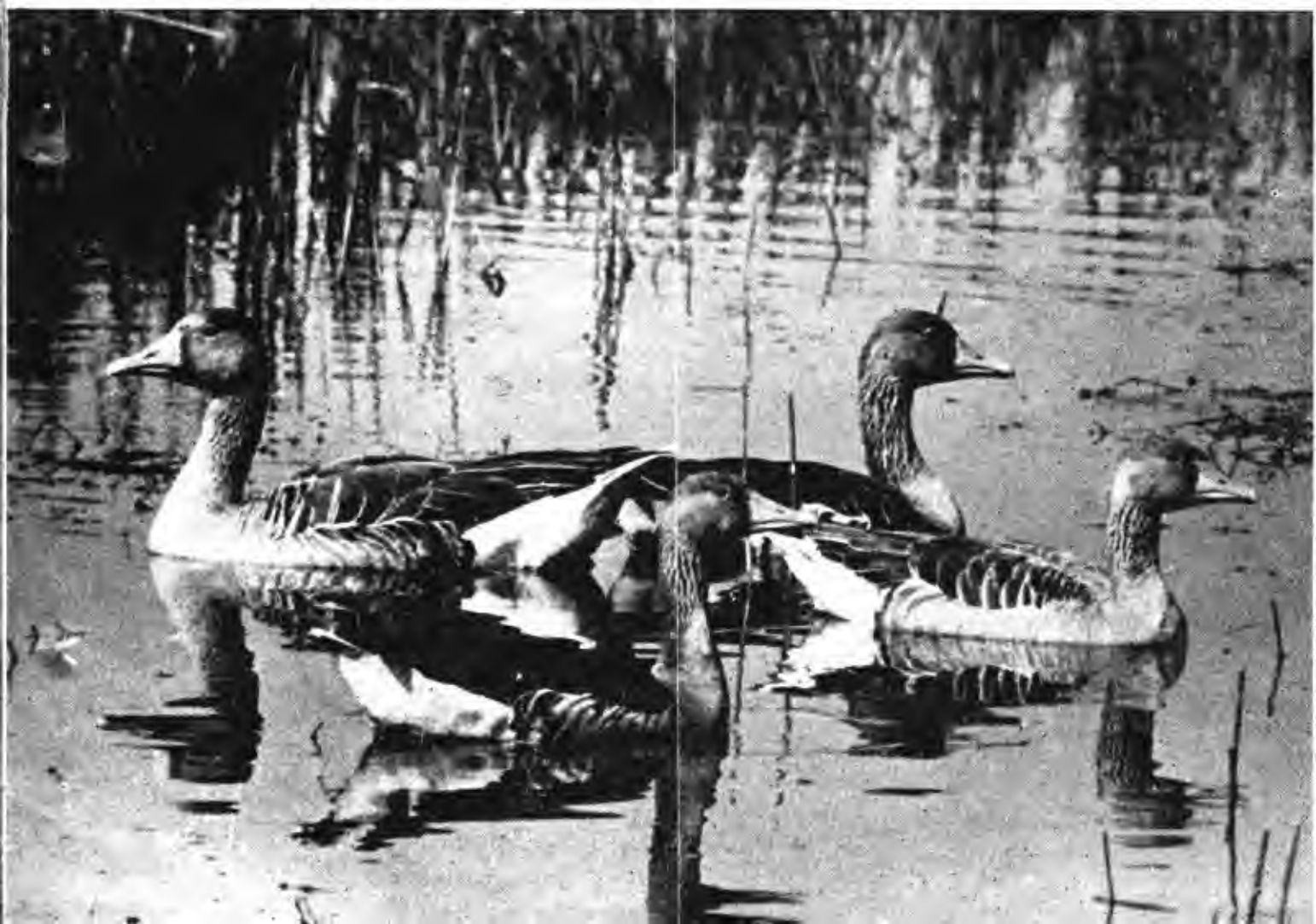
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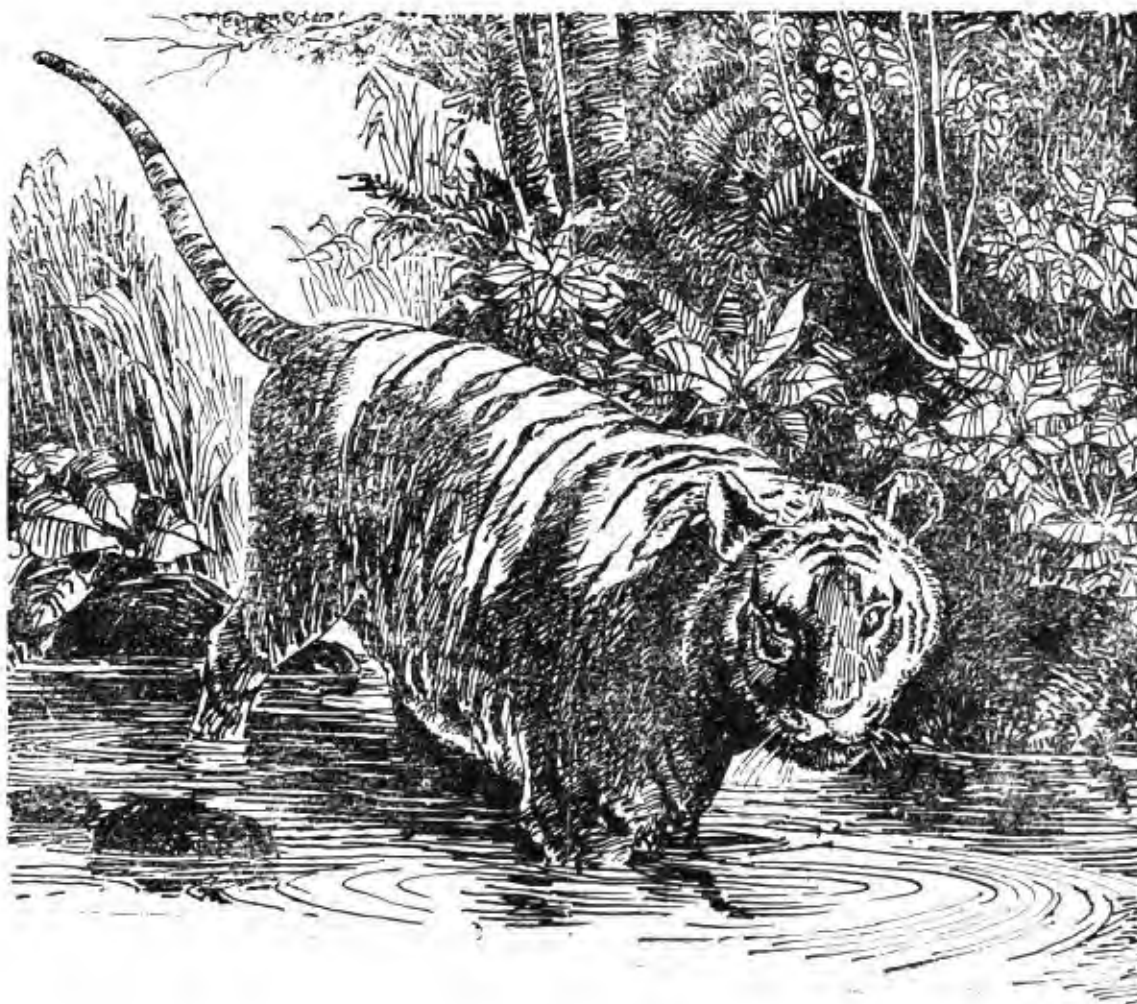
Cover Picture: GREYLAG GEESE, BHARATPUR Photo by E. Hanumantha Rao

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XVI NO. 5 MAY 1976.





## OUR HERITAGE...

the tiger by the water hole; the elephant in the forest; bison crossing a road; lions in the Gir forest; rhinos in Assam. What more valuable heritage can we have? This heritage of ours is priceless. But is being steadily destroyed. Protect our heritage...our wild life.



**TATA** ENGINEERING AND LOCOMOTIVE COMPANY LIMITED  
148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bombay-1.



NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume XVI, Number 5.

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SONNERAT'S - A JUNGLEFOWL THREATENED BY FISHERMEN

Philip Wayre

The junglefowls have been especially important to men having been domesticated by him for more than 4000 years. All domestic fowls in the world today originate from one of the four species of junglefowl which are found in southern Asia. The Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) is probably the ancestor of most chickens and domesticated forms of it were known in the Indus Valley around 2500 B.C. Like the Red Junglefowl, Sonnerat's junglefowl (*Gallus sonnerati*) occurs in India being found in the west and south of the peninsula up to Mount Abu in the northwest and east to the Godavari River. It is also found in central India and Rajputana.

In my opinion Sonnerat's Junglefowl is the most beautiful of the four species. It is sometimes called the Grey Junglefowl and the male is a most attractive bird. His slightly dented comb, lappets, bare face and throat are red. The neck hackles are long, rounded at the tip, black

fringed with grey and with yellow or whitish wax-like spots. The tail is glossy purplish-black and the wing coverts are black with white shafts and long wax-like yellow tips, the rest of the wing being black. The female has a reddish-brown crown and pale brown face. The brown neck feathers have buff centres and those of the mantle mottled light brown and black, with a whitish shaft line bordered with black. The wings are mottled black and brown with black primaries; the tail is dull black and the breast feathers are white with brown or black borders, those of the flank having brownish borders. The abdomen is pale buff.

It is the small hackles of the male's neck which have nearly caused this species' destruction, for it is these feathers which are in great demand by fishermen in Europe and America for tying flies and other lures for catching salmon and trout. The yellow wax-like tip of these feathers mislead the fish into thinking that the fly is something to eat, possibly another very small fish.

The demand for junglefowl hackles was so enormous in the West that a few years ago fears were expressed that Sonnerat's Junglefowl might become extinct unless the trade could be halted. With this in mind the Indian Government passed a law prohibiting the export of the skins or feathers of Sonnerat's Junglefowl and Britain and America have both since banned the importation of these goods. However, some other European countries have not banned their importation and it is believed that some skins are still smuggled out of India from time to time.

As one would expect of a species so closely related to the domestic chicken, Sonnerat's Junglefowl is not difficult to keep and to breed in captivity. Being polygamous one male bird can be run with five or six hens so that large numbers of fertile eggs can be obtained from comparatively few pens of these birds. Nor are they difficult to feed since they will do well on the same food that is given to domestic poultry. In the wild they feed chiefly upon seeds, grain, shoots and buds as well as insects, including the eggs and larvae of termites. For this reason birds in captivity do better on a diet which is higher in protein than that normally given to chickens. Sonnerat's Junglefowl live in bamboo groves and forests on mountain slopes up to 1600 m. where they are usually found singly or in pairs. Family parties consisting of a pair and their young may be seen but this species appears to be monogamous in the wild and does not normally congregate in flocks.

The eggs are white to pale buff and four to eight is the usual clutch. The young are as easy to rear as domestic chickens using either a bantam foster mother or an electric brooder.

Like all pheasants, and junglefowl are only a genus within the Family, Sonnerat's are comparatively easy to re-establish in the wild provided they can be protected from predators including man. However, if there is sufficient cover they soon become wary and well able to look after themselves. For any aviculturist in India living within the species' natural range, there is an ideal opportunity to do something really practical and

positive towards the conservation of wildlife by breeding these birds in captivity and releasing them in suitable wildlife reserves once the young birds are strong on the wing and old enough to fend for themselves.

First they must be penned in a temporary enclosure within the release area and after they have been there some weeks, during which time they should be given food and water daily, they should be set free a few at a time. Thereafter food and water must be given daily outside the pen. For the first few weeks they will rely on this food and will return to the pen whenever they are hungry, but gradually they will learn to find food in the jungle for themselves and will wander off and become truly wild birds. An alternative method of release and one which has proved equally satisfactory under some conditions is to allow the domestic bantam which has brought up a brood of junglefowl to wander off with them into the jungle. She will look after them until they become independent though the chances of recovering the bantam are usually remote.

The Pheasant Trust at Great Witchingham, Nr. Norwich, England, has a good breeding stock of Sonnerat's Junglefowl and would be very pleased to help with any serious project to reintroduce this species to any part of its natural range where it used to be found but has disappeared.

#### A KASHMIR HOLIDAY

D.A. Stairmand

##### 1. In and around Srinagar

The base for my three weeks' holiday in Kashmir in July, 1971 was a very pleasant houseboat on Nagin Lake, the houseboat being tethered to a willow bank. From the houseboat I could watch Common Kingfishers which were numerous and remarkably tame, Pied Kingfishers, Dabchicks, Common Swallows, Little Bitterns, Pied Wagtails, Whitecheeked Bulbuls, Common Mynas, Common Sandpipers, Golden Orioles, Cuckoos-of the 'clock' variety - small parties of magnificent European Bee-eaters hawking insects in flight, gloriously coloured Short-billed Minivets, Kashmir Rollers, Paradise Flycatchers, House Crows, Jackdaws, House Sparrows, Little Egrets, Hoopoes, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Tickell's Thrushes, Rufousbacked Shrikes, Sterlings, Ring Doves, Blackeared Kites, Whiskered Terns, Slatyheaded Parakeets, Wrynecks, Grey Tits, Great Reed Warblers.

All those, and probably more, without even having to move from the Houseboat! I think this will give readers some idea of the abundance of birds on and around Nagin Lake. The scenery of placid clean water, mountains, reed beds, willows, poplars, chinars, etc. was, of course, glorious but it can get uncomfortably hot in Srinagar in July. But a small point to set off against all the attributes.

Moving around the lake I found Great Reed Warblers very pleasantly noisy and not too difficult to see as they clambered reed stems or were on willows singing boisterously and fascinatingly. Another sound which delighted me immensely was the call of the Cuckoo. The sound coming across the water on a clear, cool morning had melancholy beauty.

Moorhens were common in reed beds and often had chicks in tow. Less common but more exciting were Ruddy Crakes making quick dashes over open patches of water from one reed bed to another. There were occasionally Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Pond and Night Herons, but not many.

A special feature of the lake was the Little Bittern. These handsome birds were common and often went into the 'on guard' position when slowly approached in a shikhere, and this sometimes made them invisible to me even though I was getting closer and closer to the bird.

'The books' told me to expect to see Paradise Flycatchers in and around Chenar trees. However, I mostly found them around willows. In any case, pairs of these birds were not uncommon and wonderful to watch. One of these pairs was frequently engaged in hard battle with a pair of White-checked Bulbuls and a pair of Rufous-backed Shrikes. Whether this was defence of young - in mature willow trees? - or territorial rights I was never able to discover. Hoopoes, Common Kingfishers and Pied Woodpeckers (which were generally fairly common) in the same area were left unmolested.

Many birds were young out of nest. To name a few - Dabchicks, Swallows, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, Shrikes, Cuckoos, Hoopoes.

On the lake the beautiful lotus was in flower and around it were wild hemp, mulberries and willows as well as poplars and chinars and orchards of pears, plums, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, walnuts, etc. The ripe fruit had attracted large numbers of Slaty-headed Parakeets and the noise made to disturb these birds did, I must admit, disturb me. Jackals howled at night and I, perhaps strangely, welcomed this sound.

Other birds in the Srinagar area included Grey Drongoes, Collared Bush-chats, Kestrels and Accentors.

Abiding memories are of a mature male Paradise Flycatcher hopping along on the ground and failing to keep his tail ribbons clear of mud on the lake margins. I hope he got them snow-white again. Another memory is of a young cuckoo having its agonizing calls for food answered by two female sparrows. I say 'agonizing' calls not for the fat, greedy baby cuckoo - who could fly just a few yards - but for its real foster parents, a pair of Rufous-backed Shrike who were harassed almost beyond endurance to supply food. I had little sympathy for the cuckoo, but perhaps I should have looked at it from another angle. To supply this ravenous cuckoo the shrikes must have gathered an incalculable number of injurious insects. Such are the ways of nature - and who are we to question them in 'wild'



life. A last memory is of a soulful young Pied Woodpecker waiting so patiently for food while clinging onto a trunk of a willow and very occasionally uttering a plaintive PIT-PIT just to let its food gathering parents know where it was.

If, by any chance, one wished for a slight diversion from 100% birdwatching there were the beautiful Nishat and Shalimar Gardens or a walk up to Hari-prabhat. Even then, Wrynecks were a great distraction from the beautiful flowers in the gardens for at least one visitor.

## II. A trek in the Lidder Valley

In addition to the Lidder Valley I also visited Sonamarg, Yusmarg, Gulmarg and the Sind River. All had great attributes, however trekking on foot (my pony had a really easy time!) for several days through the glorious Lidder Valley from Pahalgam was the highlight of my July visit. The first night under canvas a full moon rose at about 8 p.m. and only those who have camped in the Himalayas under such conditions will know the great beauty of such an experience.

On trek the scenery was magnificent - mountains, rushing torrents with huge boulders and huge pines. The scenery vied with the birds, and the many glorious butterflies vied with both. I saw very few animals of much interest. They have either been scared or hunted out, in the main.

We concentrated our route along the river and here the beautiful White-capped Redstarts and Plumbeous Redstarts, Himalayan Whistling Thrushes, Hoopoes and Pied Wagtails were common. Brown Dippers and Little Forktails were also fairly common but I did not see the Kashmir Dipper nor the Spotted Forktail - the latter omission a very sad disappointment.

Many beautiful birds seen on this trek included - Meadow Buntings, Goldfinches, Greenfinches (very colourful near Pahalgam), Crested Black Tits (extremely numerous), Greenbacked Tits, Grey Wagtails and Yellowheaded Wagtails - both in full summer dress and quite breath-taking in their beauty-, Hodgson's Shortwing, Collared Bush Chats, various 'yellow' Warblers, Blue Rock Thrush, Green Woodpeckers, Pied Woodpeckers, Redheaded Bullfinches, Rufousbellied Niltavas, Rufous Turtle Doves. Other birds, which some readers I feel might put in a more subdued category, included Cinnamon Tree Sparrows, Sooty Flycatchers (a bit drab in plumage, but what bright eyes!), Dark Grey Bush Chats, Swifts, Vultures, Grey Tits, Tree Creepers, etc. I did not do at all well with identifying birds-of-prey and I was also not successful with the larger forest birds. Perhaps because I spent most of the time watching Dippers and Redstarts!

The Whitecapped Redstart was one of the most beautiful birds in the Lidder Valley and very tame at times. Just as tame were the pairs of Plumbeous Redstarts and although I tended to ignore them a bit immediately after the first day I then had a resurgence of interest in them for the last 3 - 4 days of the 8-day trek as I had by then discovered their behaviour to be odd, eccentric and interesting. Definitely 'kinky', in fact. They are



extremely pugnacious - taking on 'all-comers' of any size or description - and display surprisingly odd cheekiness and quirks even to a rather odd onlooker. At various times I half expected them to chase me off my boulder or, perhaps in retribution, to help serve me with a riverside breakfast. As I grew more familiar with them (and they with me) I even found them more attractive in dress. They could hardly have returned this compliment as my shirt was getting blacker every day.

Dippers were the highlight of that week. What a thrill it was to watch them fishing in such masterly style making progress, even when submerged, against the most rapid torrent. Admittedly they are stocky, strung looking birds but it is visually quite unbelievable how they stand up to the furious onrush of water. As a change from this rather glamorous style they will sometimes actively pick insects off water splashed boulders or swim around rather elegantly in quieter waters at the edge of the river picking insects off the underledges of rocks. Dippers preen often and long on boulders in midstream and then it is wonderful to watch the Dippers' white eyelashes flicker. Once I watched an adult Brown Dipper feeding two speckled young birds in mid torrent - I could have watched it forever. I had no regrets I watched only Brown and not any Whitebreasted Dippers. A Dipper is a Dipper; and it is a great bird.

Collared Bush Chats are favourite birds of mine and the males were beautiful. At one camp site the parents were feeding nestlings close to my tent. However it took me about one hour with the aid of binoculars to locate the nest so well was it concealed near a bush and under a ledge of a stone very close to the ground.

I should like to write more of the great beauty of Hodgson's Yellowheaded Wagtail in full summer dress with its jet black back and bright yellow colouration seen in idyllic surroundings, and of the stupendous beauty of the male Rufousbellied Niltavas - seen on bushes near trickles of water - and of my charming encounter with the handsome Hodgson's Shortwing but, if I do, I fear the Editor will send someone hard to chop off my wrist.

However I feel I must mention the change in distribution of riverside birds even from one day to the next. For 2-3 days before the trek started it had rained very heavily in the Liddar Valley area. My eight days' trek saw only a few drops of rain. Consequently at the start of the trek the river was gushing with water and the level high. As the days passed the level became lower and rocks which had been submerged were then exposed. A particularly dramatic change came on day not only in the level and velocity of water but also in the number of birds seen in the same one mile stretch of river. The previous day I counted:- 100 + Redstarts, ca. 30 Whistling Thrushes, 5 Dippers. Next day:- 8 Redstarts; 3 Whistling Thrushes; 1 Dipper. I must assume that I had seen a movement of birds returning to their usual territories, although the fact that the Redstarts, Dippers and Thrushes included immature birds may have some relevance to the movement.

## RAJKOT BIRDS

Lavkumar Khachor

Lalpuri and Randarda are two reservoirs just ten minutes drive from the heart of Rajkot. With imagination they could be developed into wonderful bird observatories which would draw many visitors and possibly make many new converts to the cause of conservation. The local people are innately proconservation minded and I am certain many, many more would like to look at birds. It must be remembered that all are not lucky to have cars, binoculars or even the money to purchase costly bird books. If an organisation can do work things out as to encompass the common man we can certainly go a long way in winning popular appreciation. I am confident that all our schemes for conservation will bear fruit only if we approach it in a democratic manner. The Indian populace is by and large for preservation and their interest and support will help more than all the utopian resolution, legislation and conferences.

But now, let us look at the birds. We were out birdwatching at 5.45 p.m. on 15th March, 1973, just the correct time to be able to have a favourable sun on the water and the birds around. The smaller Randarda reservoir was almost dry with a stretch of water just a sling-shot across and about three shots long. As we passed, I noticed a tightly massed flock of pelicans resting on the edge. I decided to look them up on my way back and proceeded to the south side of the Lalpuri dam. This reservoir had more water and we found an interesting assortment of birds, as it normally does have at this time of the year, on its far side and on a peninsula which juts out from the northern end of the dam to halfway of the centre when the water is this low. We had the advantage of unrestricted view standing as we did on a small hill which drops almost sheer to the water below. We settled down on the rock outcrops to enjoy the sight spread out before us.

To the left, closeby, near the masonry overflow of the dam was a large flock of Little Terns wheeling around over the fish bubbling in the muddy water below. Among them were a few Whiskered Terns still in their non-breeding plumage and a couple of Gullbilled Terns. In the middle of the water below us were four Rosy Pelicans swimming and dipping their great bills into the water in a desultory fashion. They swam fairly close up till our excited talk seemed to make them suddenly aware of our presence and they moved back and a little while later two of them, adults and possibly wiser as a result, took off into the wind and then circled right towards the other lake. Scanning the shores clockwise, the binoculars paused over the peninsula and there were a dozen or so Demoiselle Crane and about five Common Crane. The french grey of the former was a clear contrast to the sandy gray of the latter. With them were several egrets, and an Osprey flew over. Beyond, out in the water huddled a flock of somnolent Flamingos so close together that it was difficult to estimate their numbers and the only colour about them was of the pink legs. On the further end, a cluster of thoroughly overfed Painted Storks rested out of

the water, quite immobile and disgracefully replete. Over them two large flocks of duck flew down to join a larger collection of still more of their kind resting in shallow water at the head of the reservoir; most of them appeared to be Shovellers. Behind them on the edge of the mud was a very big group of waders which I did not try to hazard a guess on, but most have been largely Blacktailed Godwits and Ruff and Reeve. A flock of smaller waders frequently rose and flew around showing up their white underparts as they twisted and turned to disappear again as they settled on the water and I could make out the drakes of Tufted Pochards quite distinctly. Nearer us and to our right was a bigish flotilla of Pochards and with them inshore about twenty Demoiselle Cranes roosted knee deep in the water and a pair of graceful Sarus stood head and shoulders above them. There were another ten Sarus on the further end of the lake and with them about a dozen or so Spoonbills, also fed and contented, as well as four Rosy Pelicans snoozing with their bills laid out over their backs. Turning to the left again, I looked through my fieldglasses beyond the overflow of the stream bed below, which in normal years is full of water and green with fringing reed-beds. Here one can expect to see quite a few interesting birds, but today I saw oaked mud and festering water-weeds. I made a mental note to visit the place again on Sunday morning so that I could walk along the mud-flats with the favourable morning light lighting up the feeding waders and duck.

As the day was rapidly drawing to a close I decided to go and have a look at the pelicans on the other lake. We left the car on a hill overlooking the now almost dry depression and walked over the crunchy slabs of dried mud towards the great birds. They simply ignored us until we came to within stones throw and then they awoke and started yawning, raising the bills up into the air and opening them wide, or fluttering the yellow pouches in a nonchalant manner. Then as we came closer they waddled out into the water and quite unconcernedly swam out into the middle where they remained while we stood there for half an hour looking at them and the other lesser birds around. We estimated about four hundred birds and they quite obviously intended to spend the night here and in fact from the droppings all around it was apparent that they had been in the habit of converging here to sleep for quite some time. A flock of about fifty Shoveliers did not appreciate our attention and quickly rose into the wind and flew off towards the Lalpuri Lake. Wading around in the shallows were Blackwinged Stilts and eighteen Avocets. So close were they to us that we could make out the slender upcurved bills without the glasses. Avocets and Stilts are attractive birds and I find them always interesting to watch. As the sun set in a blaze of gold, thirtyfour Rosy Pelicans soared over in a wide V formation and descended in spirals to join the rest. What a magnificent sight it was to see them glide down on large wings to touch down on the water in showers of spray. A Grey heron flew in on curved wings and uttering its loud "Kroak" "Kroak", joined the rest for the night as we left for our own nightly roosts.

## PEREGRINES FLY AGAIN

(WWF Press Release)

Morges, Switzerland - Reintroduction of the Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) in the Eastern United States, where it had been wiped out by pesticides, appears to be developing well, according to a report received by the World Wildlife Fund.

Dr. Tom Cade, of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology, reported that 16 young Peregrines bred in captivity had been released at five different release sites in 1975, and 12 of them were now living successfully in nature.

"Certainly our success in rearing 12 out of 16 young birds to the stage of independent existence in nature is better than wild Peregrine parents could manage, but the crucial measure of success still lies in the years ahead when these birds will hopefully return to take up residence and breed in the regions from which they fledged. We shall need to release many more young Peregrines during the coming years before we can claim ultimate success, but at least we made a start that encourages us to continue".

1975 was the third breeding season in the programme, which is receiving World Wildlife Fund support, and the Laboratory's production was 23 Peregrines, three Gyr falcons (*F. rusticolis*), three Prairie falcons (*F. mexicanus*), and seven Lanner falcons (*F. biarmicus*) at Cornell. Two Peregrines and 30 Prairie falcons were raised at a new facility at Fort Collins, Colorado, which is intended to specialising in the sub-species of the Peregrine found in the Rockies.

To re-introduce Peregrines to the wild young birds are placed in selected nests, which may be artificial. When fledged, after about two weeks they are allowed to take to the air, returning to take food which is put out for them. Gradually they start hunting natural prey and become independent.

CORRESPONDENCE

## ONSET OF BRAINFEVER

M.S. Ramamoorthi

Regarding Mr. Thomas Gay's article in the Correspondence Section of the Newsletter (Vol. XVI No.3 March 1976) under the heading "Onset of Brainfever" I want to state the following:

The Brainfever bird (hawk Cuckoo) is a quite common bird found throughout the year in the coastal plains of Tamil Nadu. It is probably because of the climate not becoming so cold in the winter as in many other parts of the country.



The call of the bird is usually heard at any time of the year in our villages situated in the Cauvery Delta. But while in the cool season the call is occasionally heard during day time, in the hot season prolonged feverish calls are often heard during the day and sometimes in the moonlit nights as well.

So Dr. Salim Ali's noting 'becomes increasingly obstreperous with the advance of hot weather; as well as Mr. Whistler's observations "is most vociferous from early spring to the rains" and "the call is uttered at any time of the year" are correct.

A few lines about Munia - a puzzle solved:

I remember to have read in a past Newsletter issue a strange story of a Munia escaping from a weaver bird's nest that had been picked up from the ground and taken in a vehicle. Ever since there has been a puzzle in my mind as to what made the Munia to refuge in a weaver bird's nest.

I have come across large congregations of spotted Munias and small groups of whitebreasted Munias in my birdwatching rounds. Here I want to admit not to have found any other kind of Munia in our villages. I have noticed some peculiar habits in Munias not usually found in other birds. I mean the habit of building nest, entirely for the purpose of roosting, and the habit of young birds returning to their original nests with their parents.

The spotted Munias that have migrated to our area for the present harvest season have built their globular nests in the acacia trees growing on the bunds around the rice fields surely for the purpose of roosting. Now the harvest season being at the end and most of them have abandoned their hastily built nests and left.

I have noticed in them another habit also. The fledglings of other birds that leave their nest do not return to their nest. But I have seen Munia fledglings returning to their original nest with their parents for many days.

A few days ago some members of my family and I paid a visit to the temple of a diety situated among the fields. The offerings being over at about 5 p.m. we spent the rest of the afternoon in birdwatching. Pariah Kites, Brahminy Kites, Blackwinged Kites, Redwattled Lapwings, Spotted Munias, Common Mynas, Brahminy Mynas, Wild Pigeon, Blue Jay, Black drongo, parakeets, wood sparrow, reed warbler, common green bee-eaters, palm swifts, weaver birds and some unidentified falcons were the birds we found.

There is a colony of weaver birds in a wild date palm tree growing near the temple. We saw a large number of nests. Some of them were being built. There is an acacia tree growing beneath the palm tree. Many old nests were found on the ground as well as on the acacia tree stuck to its thorny twigs. They had fallen from the palm tree. I saw a pair of Munias entering one of the old weaver bird nest.



We took home one of the nests from the ground. It was exceptionally large. We have found a Munia's nest inside the weaver bird's nest. The puzzle has been solved - Munias sometimes build their nest inside an abandoned weaverbird's nest.

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Prof. Dinesh Mohan from Roorkee writes:

I was interested to read a news item on Brain-Fever bird by T. Gay in your March 1976 issue of the Newsletter. This year the Brain-fever bird called for the first time in Roorkee on 26th January. Roorkee is normally much cooler than Poona and the temperature during the latter half of January ranges between 4 and 8 degree centigrade. This year it was slightly warmer. The Brain-fever starts calling very early in the morning and for early risers it can easily work like an alarm-clock.

This year I also noted that the Koel called for the first time on 5th March. I am now looking for the first appearance of the golden Oriole which normally makes its appearance before 15th April.

It would be worthwhile if readers of the Newsletter from different parts of the country send their observations of the first call or the first appearance of various typical birds.

#### KING CROW UNDER ATTACK

Md. Ali Reza Khan

During late February, 1975, Mr. R. Sugathan (a Research Student of Patrice Lumumba Friendship University, Moscow) and myself were trying to trap a pair of the Black-and-Orange Flycatchers, *Muscicopa nigrorufa*, in Sim's Park at Coonoor (2,000 m.) in the Nilgiris for colour marking them. The area was a little away from the main park and more towards the Pomological Station of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The major trees were *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Eucalyptus populnea*, *Syncarpus laurifolia* and different species of *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia*, *Cupressus*, etc. The undergrowth consists of *Cestrum aurantiacum*, *Solanum robustum*, *Alseodaphne australis*, *Toddalia asiatica*, *Rubus ellipticus*, *Polygonum chinense*, *Smilax* spp., etc. with a few bamboo bushes (*Bambusa* sp.) along the neighbouring feebly flowing stream.

The *Eucalyptus* trees were as high as 30 m. We noticed one pair of Pied Flycatcher Shrikes (*Hemipus picatus*) foraging high up in one of the *Eucalyptus* trees. Suddenly there appeared a Grey Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*). It was making for the honey bees. As it came close, within 3 m., of the flycatcher shrikes, they started attacking the drongo. They literally mobbed the drongo and chased it out of the *Eucalyptus* canopy.

On another occasion that is May 1975, I noted a Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) chasing the Grey Drongo. I was walking down the Sim's Park during lunch-hour. I found a Brown Shrike perched atop a bamboo clump, 5m high. Apparently it was looking down for insects. After sometime when the Grey Drongo came and sat over the same bamboo clump, the shrike immediately started attacking the Drongo. Though the latter changed perches several times the shrike went on mobbing it. Finally it was driven away at least some 20 m from the bamboo clump.

The drongo is considered to be one of the most self-confident of birds, and is even able to deal effectively with crows. Hence it is known as the King Crow. But here in Sim's Park we observed how it was mobbed down by two comparatively small species of birds. It may be noted that both the Flycatcher Shrike and the Brown Shrike were not nesting at that time. So the explanation that territory holding birds can overwhelm intruders did not apply in this case. However, when I explained these two incidents to Dr. Salim Ali, under whose guidance I am studying the Black-and-Orange Flycatcher and who was at Coonoor during May, 1975, he quipped it may be the guilty conscience of the drongos!

I am thankful to Dr. V.S. Vijayan for necessary interpretations of our observations.

#### DANK MYNAS (*ACRIDOTHERES GINGINIANUS*) NEAR POONA

L. Khanna

There is a small colony of Dank Mynas which have apparently spread to a small restricted area about 14 kms south east of Poona by the side of the National highway to Shulepur. We have been commuting on this road for the last seven years, but it was only sometime in July 1975 that we first noticed a group of 4 birds near a brick and cement well in the wheat fields just off the road. The birds have a special attachment to this well, and we have observed them roosting in the "weep-holes" inside the well. The birds are usually observed sitting on the rim of the well at about 8.15 a.m. - a little earlier in summer and later in winter.

The present strength is 9 birds; and they have only been observed in a small area about 4 kms in radius from the well. The birds have a distinct preference for wet areas e.g. inundated fields and waterlogged depressions. Continuous bird-watching by our group in a 80 km. radius of Poona has convinced us that this is perhaps the only colony of its kind in this area. In the "Handbook" also Poona (18°N) would appear to be a little far south of its known distribution.

The birds are quite tame and are observed feeding in harvested fields and other damp areas. They are often bullied by Common Mynas, and they are usually observed in pairs or a small groups of 4 or 5 birds - rarely the full complement of 9. The birds are apparently resident.

It would be gratifying to hear from other readers of the Newsletter if they have come across Senk Mynas south of lat. 20°N.

.. .. .

A perfect day here, and my garden full of sunbirds, golden orioles (very early) and little things that behave like flycatchers (jump up from a twig and flutter in the air as though catching flies) though I can't identify them. I think they are too small for Verditeras, but they may be the females. I would like to be watching them through my binoculars, but am tied to my desk with endless correspondence.

J.T.M. Gibson, Ajmer.

### The Malabar Grey Hornbill

Dr. A. Navarro

Mr. K.K. Neelakantan concludes his article on The Malabar Grey Hornbill in the March 1976 issue of the Newsletter with a question: "Do the female and young regularly squirt their excreta through the narrow slit? Although I spent 4 hours at the White Pine nest and the conditions were ideal for close observation, I did not see any evidence of this habit."

I can answer, in part, this question. I have brought up three nestling Malabar Grey Hornbills in different seasons; when the nestlings were brought to me, they must have been four to six days old.

To ~~cure~~ these young birds not much difficulty is encountered; this is due to their voracious appetite; when they open their large bills you can push down their gullet anything from a little chunk of meat to a chickoo or even a wild fig.

I kept the little chicks in a small basket to serve as a nest, inside a large cage; at my very first attempt I got into trouble; I did not know how to keep the little basket clean and dignified for the sake of the stream of daily visitors who wanted to see the antics of the little Malabar Grey Hornbills. At this stage I did notice the droppings were somehow different from the droppings of other birds like the bulbuls and crows. On investigation I found that each dropping was enclosed in a whitish gelatinous sack or capsule. These capsules were being removed by the female, though the nests were in treeholes or in ground tunnels.

In the earlier stages the female swallows these capsules; as the chicks grow older, they too swallow these capsules for some time. Despite my constant observation I never did see the little chicks swallow their droppings. As the birds grew older they tried to squirt out their droppings from the basket; this was a great relief to me for the little basket was kept clean and dry. At this advanced stage, the little chicks hesitated to swallow

their food; I used forceps to feed them; they started pecking at the food with soft jerks; they rolled the food up and down in the bill and finally keeping the food near the tip of the **bill**, with a strong **jerk** they would swallow the food. This procedure took place mainly when the birds were fed with meat, carvandas or wild berries.

A friend of mine who showed keen interest in the Question has motivated this response based on the experience I had acquired dealing with the mess of a single hornbill chick during the growing process in the improvised basket nest.

Once a nest with young chicks was found and we decided to spend some time observing how the female dealt with her sanitary problems. Early in the morning we used to take our position at the back of the nest, and we noticed the little pullets being ejected from the nest in all directions. Some fell near, others were thrown quite a distance. Thereupon I surmised that as the little hornbills grew older they would squirt their droppings in the same manner as the mother hornbill.

#### THE KORA OR WATER COCK (GALLINEX CINEREA)

T.V. Jose

2-6-'74. In the evening, as I was making my rounds on the sea-side, near Dangur Nagar, Maragan (west), to my surprise I heard the drummings of the Kora. I could not believe myself and started doubting whether I was transported in my fancy to culc (rice) fields of Trichur, Kerala, where exactly at this time of the year, standing on their ridges, one could see the same birds in large numbers. However, repeated calls of the Kora from the compound of Eastern Ceramics Ltd., on my left side, confirmed, that I was not in a dream-land but was on the firm ground of Bombay. My patience and eagerness were at once rewarded when I could catch glimpses of two male birds moving through the spaces between clumps of mangrove (*Avicenna officinalis*).

16.6.'74. This time I had taken binoculars with me. I heard the Kora calling more frequently, which is an indication of their oncoming breeding season, but no bird was to be seen.

Also I heard the clamour and riot of a "cantankerous" courting couple of white breasted water hens, roughly from the same area. What a striking difference they make in their love protestations; yet, both the Kora and the Water hen appear to be close cousins!

#### DISCOVERY OF A PELICANNY IN KARNATAKA

S.G. Neginhal

In the first week of April, 1976, while going to Bangalore, I saw over one hundred Painted Storks (*Ibis leucocapillus*) actively feeding in a desiccating water tank. The presence of such large number of birds spontane-

ously suggested that these birds should be breeding somewhere nearby. As I had not time to follow them, I just postponed my quest and proceeded to Bangalore.

After a couple of days I specially went to this spot to trace the breeding grounds of these Painted Storks and my perambulation took me to Jallur village in Mandya District, where I found hundreds of Painted Storks nesting on the trees in the backyards and agricultural fields of the villagers. As I was observing them I spotted some big sized birds with heavy flattened bills underhung by elastic pouches. These were Spotted-billed or Grey Pelicans, *Pelecanus philippensis*. Soon I found a number of these Pelicans nesting along with the Painted Storks on many of the trees. Some Pelicans were incubating, some were carrying nesting material and some had nestlings. The readers can imagine my joy at this discovery which is apparently the first record for Karnataka State.

In the adjoining Dannailli village many more Pelicans were found breeding.

These Pelicans and Painted Storks were found breeding in mixed colonies on the figs, Tamarind and *Acacia arabica* trees planted by the villagers in their backyard and dry agricultural fields. The local villagers are giving great protection to these birds and poachers are heavily fined.

I hope to write a detailed article on these breeding Pelicans later.

#### NEWS FROM AUROVILLE

Yesterday I was called to rid someone's apartment of a fierce brute of a bird, - probably a young eagle or kite or what not, that had resisted all shooting and terrorised the inhabitant.

Well, it turned out to be a very sweet tempered, totally exhausted and near-dead *Turdoides malcolmi*. Its presence here is a total mystery to me, and the said apartment is situated directly on the coast, facing the sea. Since when do the large grey Babblers migrate?

It was merely its lovely clear yellow eyes, that made such an impression of "aggressiveness" on the terrorised man. He had not dared touch it even with a stick, for fear of being instantly torn to shreds...Oh well.

As for the Babbler, one hour after a little drink and a little handful of insects, it was able to stand on its feet again. This morning it is vigorously flapping its wings and gulping large quantities of insects, scrambled egg, milk and all that. Its recovery is just as fast anyone could wish.

But what is this Babbler doing here? And (presumably) single, as none of his species have so far been observed to my knowledge. But I shall make further enquiries with my fellow-birdwatchers here in the Ashram.



Now a little anecdote on our endemic species of *Turdoides striatus-melodius* (at least that's what they **SHOULD** be called) 4 helpless nestlings were handed in. Once fully grown, and very much against their inclination, they were "liberated" only to have them hopping about on top of the aviary for the first so-many days. Then they slowly enlarged their horizon and by the end of the week there were five of them, confidently clamouring for food. And one week after that, there were seven, all alighting with equal confidence and eagerness on the "public" food tray, ousting all the others (Com. Mynas, Br. Mynas, Drongos, Bluejay, Bulbuls Sparrows etc.) happily giggling, and gorging themselves. Now, since about two months, it's still seven and they are coming regularly, though their 'territory' seems to be rather large. (How did they know about their popular name?).

Four Drongos *Dicrurus adsimilis* came to me as week-old babies from a storm-destroyed nest. They thrived on insects and when my supplies became less than scarce, I just stuffed them with finely chopped pancake, made of flour, milk, eggs and some ground-up shrimp. To my utter amazement, they went on thriving - and spitting up little pellets of sheer, undigested starch! Fabulous. But as time went on, they developed the necessary enzyme to digest even starch and now, five months later, they are still in the vicinity and though they are constantly squabbling, they all 4 of them still come regularly for their relished pancake-snack right onto my hand (arm, shoulder or head) asking to be fed, just like babies. And they'll not let go of me before they have had their fill, even if I have to walk right through the house with those birds 'taking a ride'. Yes, they are very lovely and they imitate the giggling of the Babblers, as perfectly as all other sounds in their vicinity, interspersed with their natural grating, just as if they had "to wind up the mechanism of the musik-box). They are delightful.

As every year, exhausted Pittes are falling in number, and all too often left to die in some cage. It is true, they **ARE** very difficult to keep and restore, so as to release them with re-gained strength. They never (in my care) took a single bite of food by themselves, even in the most ideally secluded + shrubby corner. And when fed forcibly, they refuse to swallow. It takes all cunning, patience and cut-up earth-worms to get them back into a viable condition.

Shanto Neville  
22-10-1974.

#### BLEWITT'S OWL (*ATHENE BLEWITTI*)

S. Dillon Ripley

During a search in two areas adjacent to the former range of Blewitt's Owl, namely along the Mahanadi River in Western Orissa and the adjacent Simlipal Hills in February 1975 and, in the Melghat Tiger Reserve area in northeastern Maharashtra in February 1976 just south of the Tapi River,

Dr. Salim Ali and I have been unable so far to find a trace of Blewitt's Owl. This species formerly ranged along the Satpura Hills from Maharastra and the Tapi River (last record Mandvi in 1914) east to the Madhya Pradesh-Orissa border. The decline in condition of the forests in the area and the general deforestation which seems to have advanced in the subsequent sixty-odd years may mean that the range of this forest species is severely contracted now or possibly that the bird is virtually extinct. No other significant reason for its decline would seem to be apparent than the changes in the environment in the area of its range.

### AT HOME

Mr. T. Gay of Raona has made an excellent suggestion about 'At Home' in the April issue of the Newsletter.

I write to say that any subscriber to the Newsletter, or any one at all who is interested in birdwatching, is welcome to my house at Indore (which is also the office of the Ornithological Society of Central India, Indore) for light refreshments and for some birding with me on my morning walks. As I occasionally go out of Indore I cannot give precise dates and times for the visit, so a letter or telephone call in advance will be helpful. If the visitor is in need of accommodation for a day or two, I might be able to do something.

Dr. P.T. Thomas  
13 Old Shore Road  
Indore (MP) 452001.  
Tele: Residence 6694  
Office 4218

In response to the feature AT HOME (Newsletter April 1976, pp 12) I wish to add that I would be delighted to play host for visiting birders at Vishakapatnam for a day or two. They can either write to me in advance or telephone, so that my availability can be ascertained. If anybody wants to know more about the area and the sort of birds they can expect, they can write to me.

Name and address: K.S.R. Krishna Raju  
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*of*

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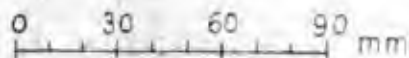


Rare



Common

Jerdon's or  
Doublebanded Courser



Indian Courser

### WHERE IS JERDON'S COURSER? AN INQUIRY

Courser are ground-living birds, slightly smaller than the Grey Partridge. They inhabit open sandy or stony waste land, fallow cultivation, and thinscrub jungle. The Indian Courser (right) is common throughout the plains of India. Jerdon's, or the Doublebanded Courser (left) is so rare that it has not been reliably seen since the year 1900. It was then known only in the Godavari and Penner valleys in Andhra Pradesh—Nellore, Cuddapah, Sironcha, Bhadrachalam and Anantapur neighbourhoods—but may be found elsewhere. The double breast-band will readily distinguish it from the commoner Indian Courser.

If this bird is seen by you kindly report to your nearest forest official with particulars as to locality, date, and numbers seen. Forest or other Government officials, and shikaris and village headmen are requested to kindly pass on this information to Bombay Natural History Society, Shaheed Bahgat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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*of*

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NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

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GOLDFINCH IN THE PLAINS?

P.T. Thomas

Goldfinch in India (*Carduelis carduelis*), unlike rain in Spain, does not stay mainly in the plains; or so say the books. Is it possible at all, though, that an individual or two in a fit of foolish abandon might stray into the lower plains in the cold season to become what the ornithologist will describe as a rare winter vagrant? I am much puzzled about this question for at the height of the Central Indian winter this year - on the 21st January to be precise - when the mornings and evenings are quite uncomfortably chilly, with clear skies and a mild sun, I saw this bird the like of which I had never seen before. The nearest it comes to in the coloured illustrations is the Greyheaded Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis caniceps*) as in, say, Salim Ali (1974) X, 135. Although described (*loc. cit.*) as "Common resident, subject to vertical movements", the statement on Status, Distribution and Habitat goes on to say: "Withdraws from the upper levels in winter and descends to the valleys and foothills, occasionally into the adjacent plains (Ambala, Rawalpindi)." One cannot gather from this that the bird might tend to move further down into Central India. And if it in fact did so, it would have strayed far from its accustomed winter haunts. Nor can I find the bird described as a rare visitor or vagrant into the Central Indian plains although that is not saying much



for my research on the question is laughably elementary. Whistler (1949) corroborates the North Pakistan-North Punjab range of the bird in winter, it being otherwise a Himalayan species. He says nothing of the bird being seen elsewhere in India at any time. "The well known Goldfinch, conspicuous with its crimson face and golden wingbar, is common in the Western Himalayas, Kashmir and Baluchistan, coming down to the North-west Frontier Province and Northern Punjab in winter. It lacks the black head markings of the English species and belongs to the Asiatic species *Carduelis caniceps*." (p.223) I should imagine that what he means by 'the black head markings of the English species' is the prominent black of the crown reaching almost to the nape, and not the black of the lores for this latter marking is apparently common to both the English and the Asiatic species.

(To remove the possible confusion about the Latin names let me say that the Asiatic species, which I believe to be the same as what Salim Ali calls the Greyheaded Goldfinch, is *Carduelis caniceps* in Whistler's, and *Carduelis carduelis caniceps* in Salim Ali's. Why this is so, I cannot say. Similarly, the typical English species is simply *Carduelis carduelis* in the smaller field guides like Campbell's the Oxford Book of Birds (1964), and Heinzel's The Birds of Britain and Europe (1974). But in Witherby's Handbook of British Birds (1943) I, 58, it is designated as *Carduelis carduelis britannica*. I suspect that the ornithologists are doing this on purpose to baffle their poor relations, the birdwatchers.)

Now then, this bird that I saw (and has been causing me much misery since then) was a solitary specimen perched on what I think was the dry flower head crowning a cotton plant (*Gossypium arboreum*) or some weed plant at a height of, say, 24 to 30 ins. from the ground in a two-acre cotton field in the extensive farmlands of the Agriculture College of Indore. This was a dwarfish variety of cotton called Khandwa II - it was first developed in the Khandwa region of Madhya Pradesh - known for its resistance of pests and diseases. The plants were well past their youth for many of the leaves had turned brown and dry, and the pods had started opening up on many of the plants. The plant on which the bird was sitting - I couldn't tell whether it was a cotton plant or some weed or other plant that grew alongside - was well inside the field and at a distance of 25 to 30 yards from the road. The time was a little before 9.00 a.m. It had rained slightly some three or four days before and the weather had turned colder since. In my occasional morning walks through the College farmlands I used to see numerous small Warblers in the cotton field. If one peered under the plants one would see also several Pipits walking about stealthily on the ground. I could only tell that the Warblers were Warblers, and the Pipits Pipits; not what species of Warblers or Pipits they were.

On this particular morning I had gone back to the place to get a better look at the Warblers and Pipits and see if I could get closer to identifying them by their correct species. As I was standing on the road, eyes roving for the birds I was after, this bird on the bush-top in the distance appeared suddenly in view. Whether it was sitting there all the time or had only just alighted I couldn't say. See with the named eye, and at that distance,

there wasn't anything special about the bird; it might well pass for some ordinary sparrow or some such bird - brownish-seeming on the whole, and about sparrow-sized - but I thought I would have a closer look anyway, so I looked at it through the binoculars. What I saw made me nearly jump for excitement because here was a bird I had never seen before nor could remember seeing in bird pictures or the field guides. It had a bright crimson chin which, facing the sun as it happened to be, shone and glistened like some illuminated velvet. What on earth is this, I wondered. Surely, I must investigate further. The first thing to do was to try and get a look at it from the front and, if it would permit me, from a closer position, so I walked left along a footpath and took my stance more or less in front of it but still at about 25 yards away. Looking at it again from that position I noticed that its forehead was also the same colour as the chin, and that the area separating the chin and forehead behind the bill was black. Getting curiouser and curiouser, I walked towards the bird with cautious steps and stopped at what I judged a safe distance. Just as I was adjusting the binoculars again, my quarry took off with a bound and flew away at terrific speed gaining distance and height very quickly. That was the last I saw of it. Returning to the spot at the same time two days running availed nothing as far as this bird was concerned.

My first thought on spotting this bird was that it might be a Redheaded Bunting for the description seemed to fit and I hadn't seen one before. Checking with the books, however, I saw that my guess was wrong. By a process of elimination of various other likely candidates, I finally came upon the Greyheaded Goldfinch as the one that came nearest to answering the bird's general features, colouration and racial origin. And yet, I must admit that there are a number of difficulties about concluding that this was indeed this. Apart from the unlikely habitat, there is the question of the wings. All descriptions that I have been able to see of the Goldfinch, no matter what sub-species, refer to the black in its wings, and the conspicuous bright yellow patch. Tail black and white. Below, chin and area around bill crimson bordered with whitish buff." (Salim Ali). "A most distinctively plumaged finch with red face, yellow wingbars, whitish rump and back, and white on head, wings and tail." (Heinzel). This latter for the typical English Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis* simply, or *Carduelis carduelis brittanica* if one likes to give it its full title. Campbell describes the Goldfinch (again, the English Goldfinch) as "distinguished by its black wings with 'gold bands' and white spots, black white-tipped tail, and red white and black head."

I did not notice the yellow (or gold) in the wings, nor do I remember to have noticed the black and white in the wings, but some white in the face did strike me, and this goes well with what Salim Ali has about the "crimson bordered with whitish buff." The fact that the yellow and black of the bird did not come to my attention needn't mean that I did not see it closely enough or long enough for all its colours to impress themselves on me. After all, the most I had was a ten-second sight of it in two instalments from 25 yards away with a 8 x 30 binoculars. And in all that time my entire attention was concentrated on its crimson face which is the feature that

most impressed me. The general stance of the bird with its alert look and bill pointing straight in front, very much as in the illustration of the head in Salim Ali, X, 135, was something that did strike me although that may not be a typical feature.

The bird's manner of flight did not appear to me to be characterised by special pointers for identification, nor do the writers give identical descriptions of the flight. Heinzel: "Flight notably dancing." Campbell: "...bounding flight ... erratic ..." Witherby: "... with usual finch undulations, but with noticeably light, flitting and 'dancing' action." Salim Ali: "... slightly undulating, typically sparrow-like." As far as I observed, the flight was very sparrow-like, slightly undulating, and fast with that 'bounding' quality evident in take-off and flight. As for calls, I did not hear any.

Weighing the negatives and positives, I feel like Addison's Sir Roger who, "with the air of a man who would not give his judgement rashly" told them that much might be said on both sides. Nonetheless, I would think that all the available evidence goes slightly in favour of identifying the bird as the Grayheaded Goldfinch or its close relation, the Central Asian Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis subulata*) which Salim Ali describes as "a rare winter vagrant." In either case, the sighting of this bird as far south as Indore must be a rare event unless, in my stupid ignorance, I am making much ado about nothing.

#### Notes:

1. On further observation of those 'Warblers' in the cotton field, of which there were considerable numbers, I am led to believe that they were the Brown Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita tristis*), c.f., Salim Ali VIII, p.137.
2. The Pipits in the same field were probably Witherby's Tree Pipits (*Anthus trivialis haringtoni*) although they did not invariably fly into trees when disturbed; they tended to fly up to nearby electric wires and perch on them until they flew down to the ground once again, or to distant fields beyond reach of the eyes. But if Tree Pipits fly into nothing but trees when disturbed, my guess is wrong.

#### References:

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## THE BLACK-THROATED THRUSH IN NORFOLK

S.K. Reeves

Considerable excitement was caused, not only in Norfolk but farther afield, when a Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*) turned up in Norfolk about a month ago at a place called Coltishall.

The bird was in a meadow at the end of a lane and bordering the river Bure.

It was first discovered about the 20th February, and it was not until the 27th February that my wife, a friend and I motored the 25 miles to Coltishall to see the bird. We felt that our chance of seeing it was slight, but such a rarity merited the effort. We were in luck and had excellent, prolonged views of a male bird in good plumage.

The thrush had evidently found a spot which suited its needs - an ample food supply, seclusion, an abundance of tall trees in the neighbourhood to provide shelter and roosting sites - so it lingered. In fact, I only heard yesterday, the 21st March, that it was still there.

As soon as the news got around, birdwatchers from all over the county and the country converged on Coltishall; making use of whatever form of transport they could find. The day of the week made no difference, the gallery was always full and Britain's economy suffered a severe check. The thrush itself was most obliging and almost seemed conscious of the fact that it was playing to full houses.

As far as I can ascertain from the records at my disposal, this is only the fifth occurrence of this species in Britain. Oddly enough, the previous occurrence was also in Norfolk at Holkham in October last.

Only the form '*atrogularis*' is correctly known as the Black-throated Thrush. The distinctive *T.r.ruficollis* being known as the Red-throated Thrush.

This thrush is a Central Palearctic breeding species, with the Black-throated form breeding in the North and Western portion of its range.

Both forms, that is the Black-throated and the Red-throated, are winter visitors to India, with the former being the more abundant. They are found all along the Himalayan chain from the N-W.F.P. to Assam, Bangladesh and N. Burma. The Black-throated form is also found in Baluchistan down to the Mekran coast and in Sind. The extension of the Black-throated Thrush into the plains is governed by weather conditions and it may occur as far South as Rajasthan and Gorakhpur, and has, in fact, been recorded as far South as 21°N.

Both forms of this bird are dealt with in Volume 9 of the "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan". A male of the species is illustrated in that volume, but both male and female are illustrated at Plate 42 in Volume 2 of the 'Handbook of British Birds' (an exquisite little painting by the late G.E. Lodge; one of the finest of British painters of birds).



## THE CHEER PHEASANT AND ITS REINTRODUCTION IN THE HIMALAYAS

Philip Wayre

The Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichi* is a curious bird in many ways. It is the only member of its genus and the male lacks the brilliant plumage of so many pheasants. Indeed, the sexes are rather similar with their somewhat dull plumage of browns and greys and their short brown crests. The Cheer Pheasant's legs are short and powerful and its bill is much used for digging. However, what this bird lacks in the form of colourful plumage is redeemed by its interesting behaviour. One of the most noticeable things about the Cheer Pheasant is its noise. Both sexes have a considerable vocabulary which in its high-pitched raucous notes recalls that of the eared pheasants. The cock's challenging call during the breeding season is made with its head pointing straight upwards and starts with a series of harsh, grating calls in rapid succession, rising to a crescendo of very high-pitched disyllabic whistles. Sometimes the pair will duet together. When feeding, both sexes utter a series of quiet cackling notes, not unlike those of domestic fowls.

Cheer Pheasants feed on grubs, insects, seeds, roots, berries, tender shoots and leaves. Much of their food is obtained by digging with their stout bills. The hen lays her eggs in a slight depression in the ground under cover of vegetation and a normal clutch varies between 7 and 14 eggs. The young pheasants are easy to rear and they assume adult plumage during their first year and are able to breed in the spring following their birth.

The range of the Cheer Pheasant appears always to have been very limited and its distribution is local. It is essentially a bird of rather open, scrubby, forests and prefers steep hills with rocky cliffs or ledges covered in scrub, especially where high altitude oaks grow in the small valleys and ravines. I have seen this species in the wild only once, high up in the Western Himalayas on the way up to Simla. It might be thought that a bird living in such rugged country at fairly high altitudes would be safe from persecution, but unfortunately, for the Cheer Pheasant not only has its range always been limited, but it is a bird with strong attachment to its territory, so that hunters are able to return again and again to the same area until they have wiped out the entire local population. Found only in the Western Himalayas from Pakistan east to Nepal, it is now in danger of extinction in the wild. The Pheasant Trust's interest in the possible reintroduction of the Cheer Pheasant to its native land began back in 1967 when I was a state guest of the government of Himachal Pradesh at Simla. Knowing my interest in pheasants, the State Wildlife Warden, Mr. Mehta, kindly took me on several trips into the mountains in search of Koklass, White-crested Kalij and Cheer Pheasants. In those parts of the Western Himalayas, all three species are sometimes found in the same coniferous forests which are chiefly composed of large Deodar, Morenda Pine and Kail Pine, with patches of deciduous trees including the Kharshu Oak. The undergrowth in the gloomy light beneath the Deodars is scant, but in open places or wherever the sun can penetrate there is a dense and often impenetrable shrub layer which includes such species as Berberi,



Cotoneaster, Deutzia, Lonicera and Viburnum, all names familiar enough to any gardener. While I was there I suggested to Mr. Mehta that young birds bred at the Pheasant Trust should be sent as a gift to the State Government for subsequent release in a forest where their future protection could be assured. Fortunately, there was an ideal place in the form of the water catchment area above Simla. This was once part of the Cheer Pheasant's natural range and the whole forest is strictly protected.

In June 1971 Mr. Mehta came to England and was a guest of the Pheasant Trust. It was then that he reported that two release pens had been constructed and that the State Authorities had agreed for the reintroduction scheme to go ahead. On 10 November that year, twelve pairs of Cheer Pheasants were dispatched from the Trust. All arrived in perfect condition and after a short period in quarantine were removed to the two release pens which had been prepared for them. The subsequent release procedure was supervised by Mr. Mehta himself and went according to plan.

In December 1973 a further twelve pairs of Cheer Pheasants bred at the Trust were dispatched to Himachal Pradesh and were later released in the same Reserved Forest where the first birds had been set free. So far as is known birds from both these releases have survived in the wild and the reintroduction appears to have been successful. The last report from Mr. Mehta during the summer of last year was that young birds had been sighted in the area.

#### FAUNA OF THE EASTERN GHATS - PLEA FOR A THOROUGH STUDY

K.S.R. Krishna Raju

The vast and diverse vertebrate life of peninsular India which is a rich legacy and heritage of nature has been the subject of much exploration and research by individual scientists and institutions like the Bombay Natural History Society. The clarion call of the late Dr. Sunder Lal Hora, concerning the need for research on the flora and fauna of peninsular India and their affinities with the Malayan Flora and Fauna mobilised naturalists and a considerable amount of data was collected on almost all vertebrate life. However, we know more about the birds of this region than about the other smaller vertebrates amphibians and reptiles.

Indo-Malayan element in the fauna of south western India and other adjoining regions was admirably shown by Hora (49), Salim Ali (49), Abdul Ali (49), Roonwal & Dholanath (49), Jayaraman (49) and others. However, its spread into the peninsula, particularly the SW parts of the Western Ghats was a long anathema to scientists till Hora established his Satpura hypothesis in the year 49. However, there has always been the other alternative possibility to explain the spread and discontinuity in other areas in between. Humayun Abdulali (49) has produced a mass of evidence to show that birds might have also used the Eastern Ghats for their dispersal and similar alternatives are not altogether ruled out by other scientists like

Salim Ali and Jayaraman. However, as already pointed out earlier, in the absence of any systematic and planned approach to the problem and its investigation nothing definite has been possible either to rule out the alternative or to substantiate it. The major Ornithological publications mentioned above have not only made the distributional data up-to-date, but also lent some support to the Eastern Ghats corollary, which can not be neglected as a mere cul-de-sac.

The Bird migration studies carried out in the peninsular region have led to the 'discovery' of certain bird species which were hitherto considered absent in the region. *Arachnothera longirostris* (Spider Hunter) and *Passer montanus* (Tree Sparrow) at Lammasinghi in the Vishakapatnam district of the Andhra Pradesh (Krishna Raju-72, 75) are two such interesting bird records, for they were considered absent in the Eastern Ghats region though they were recorded earlier along the tracts of Eastern and NW Indian regions and again the SE Ghats (Tree Sparrow was not recorded previously in the Peninsular region) of India. This is a clear case of discontinuous distribution and the evidence strongly suggests that we cannot, after all keep the Eastern Ghats corollary in the ice. The migration studies have also brought to our notice many interesting aspects of avian movements and other distributional and passage status. The discovery of *Hemicircus canente* in the Orissa hills, Barkudia in Vishakapatnam, some Orchids in the E. Ghats having Himalayan affinities and many such piecemeal data, when once put together makes an interesting picture for scientists.

The biotope at Lammasinghi is entirely different from that of Western Ghats where the Malayan element is found, and from the Eastern Himalayas from where the birds are recorded previously. It is very interesting to note that the birds are occurring in two entirely different biotopes and without undergoing any morphological changes over the period of time. (Spider Hunter and Tree Sparrow were examined at BNHS collection to find out whether there is any morphological difference between the two populations occurring in two different biotopes). This obviously will lend support to the accepted theory that these birds at Lammasinghi are relicts. However, as per the recent studies made by Amadon and others, the species so distinctly separated may have different physiological capacities which is only the first step that eventually leads to morphological differences in the long run. The aspect of physiological distinctiveness in isolated populations with marked indistinct morphological characters in two different ecological environments was demonstrated in certain marine forms and genetic and cytological differences in such population of birds also was established beyond doubt.

All this suggests that there is a great need and scope for the field scientists in India to work on the vertebrate fauna of the Eastern Ghats, preferably in and around Vishakapatnam Ghats to solve these above mentioned problems conclusively. A systematic study of all groups of living forms including plants would no doubt bring out a great deal of interesting information and would once for all give some definite proof to some of the

controversial aspects like the Satpura hypothesis and Eastern Ghats corollary, etc. It is also found that the basic data on many aspects of systematics is lacking from the Eastern Ghats in quantity-wise, as compared to the existing data from the Western Ghats. It is necessary to find out the percentage of endemism, species commonness and diversity between the Eastern, Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas together with the Malayan fauna, in the light of Satpura hypothesis vis-a-vis the corollary with an open mind.

Are any of our readers interested in this project?

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### WHERE DO DARTERS SLEEP?

K.K. Neelakantan

Dr. N.R. Prabhu and Sri Hrishikesan Nair, as part of a fisheries research project, wanted to estimate the population of Darters in the Neyyar reservoir, some 18 miles from Trivandrum. Some members of the local Natural History Society agreed to assist in conducting a census. The party left the Dam at 6 a.m. on 24-12'74. It was a chill and cloudy morning. When it drizzled, because of the speed of the motor boat, the little drops struck our faces like a flight of Liliputian arrows.

Although we had expected to find Darters scattered about all over the lake, it was 6.40 when we saw our first Darter. We were moving in the direction from which this bird and 3 more had come flying singly. At 7 we reached a place where a number of bamboo clumps stood, most of them surrounded by shallow water. On one of these sat 32 Darters and 2 Little Cormorants. The bamboo clump was almost white, being liberally coated with the droppings of these birds. Our arrival was the signal for many of these birds to fly off. A few dived into the water. All the Darters were in adult plumage.

When we were returning we found Darters at various places. The fact that almost the entire community was found on a bamboo clump which was so thickly encrusted with droppings suggested that the Darters of this lake had a common roost and preferred a bamboo clump surrounded by water.

##### CROWS' CACHE (CORVUS SPLENDENS)

Debashis Ray

One of those itinerant fishmongers who used to be common in Delhi in the late fifties was gutting a fish by the roadside with several crows cawing in attendance. The man threw the offal to the birds who started squabbling over it. One crow, having secured a large piece, moved away from its companions. About a metre away it dropped the piece and then to my surprise, started covering it with beakfuls of dirt and gravel. Having

covered the piece to its own satisfaction it rejoined the group. The job was botched however (the piece being still visible) and another crow immediately sauntered over, picked up the cache and swallowed it.

That was fifteen years ago. Time and again after that I have seen crows burying food though it is never a common sight. A more recent occasion when I took notes was in Lucknow. An excerpt from my diary dated December 12, 1971 (4.45 pm; dusk) reads: "Saw a lone crow picking up bits of stones and plaster and dropping them at a point nearby. It seemed to be burying something with a furtive air. As I approached it ceased its work, took a couple of steps forward and erected the feathers on its crown. Soon after I passed it resumed its work.

"About an hour later I scratched the pile of dry, broken up plaster at the point where the crow had been busy and found a teaspoonful of cold, cooked rice just below the surface."

The erected feathers suggest excitement. It is often seen in crows during courtship, just before a fight, occasionally when one stares at them, but most often for no discernible reason at all.

Has any of the readers seen crows hiding food in cracks and crevices of buildings and trees? I have only seen them burying food. And has anyone seen them coming back for the hidden food as I have never been able to check on this either?

#### BIRDWATCHING IN COONDOOR

Sarah Jameson

I have frequently been out birdwatching with Dr. Salim Ali's student Reza Khan (he is studying the Black and Orange Flycatcher). Today, in the course of an hour, we saw more birds than ever before here. It was one of those lovely golden afternoons, and the shola was alive with birds. So often in the same place we have been lucky if we have seen 5 or 6 species, but today we saw 30! This shola is about seven minutes car drive from the main Post Office, and is a lovely peaceful spot, but alas, wood gatherers are beginning to denude it. We are now able to move about more or less freely up and down slopes that were almost impenetrable last year. If only they would clear that horrible plant Smilax! I feel it is a singularly inappropriate name! In working our way down to the haunt of the Pied Ground Thrush we had to fight our way through a tangle of thorns, but fortunately were rewarded by seeing the bird. A pair live there beside a very small stream, and the rocks round there are covered with droppings.

It might interest you to read what birds we saw during the hour (and the two or three we only heard).



Red Whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus fuscicaudatus*)  
 Southern Black Bulbul (*Microscelis psaroides*)  
 Yellow Browed Bulbul (*Iole Icterica*)  
 Grey-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus priocephalus*)  
 Small Green Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*)  
 Blackcapped Blackbird (*Turdus merula nigropileus*)  
 Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti leschenaulti*)  
 Blue Chat (*Luscinia brunnea*)  
 Nilgiri Quaker Babbler (*Alcippe poioicephala poioicephala*)  
 Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus*)  
 Grey Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus longicaudatus*)  
 Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos erythrorhynchos*)  
 Black-and-Orange Flycatcher (*Muscicapa nigrorufa*)  
 Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis ceylonensis*)  
 Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Muscicapa tickelliae tickelliae*)  
 Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias albicaudata*)  
 White-spotted Fantail Flycatcher (*Rhipidura pectoralis*)  
 Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)  
 Southern Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis ceylonensis*)  
 Small Sunbird (*Nectarina minima*)  
 Indian House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)  
 White-bellied Shortwing (*Brachypteryx major albiventris*)  
 Nilgiri House Swallow (*Hirundo taitica domicola*)  
 Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher Shrike (*Hemipus picatus picatus*)  
 Indian Grey Tit (*Parus major Mahratterum*)  
 Orange-headed Ground Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*)  
 Nilgiri White-eyes (*Palpebrosa nilgiriensis*)  
 Ashy Wren Warbler (*Prinia socialis socialis*)  
 Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*)  
 Malebar Golden Backed (three toed?) Woodpecker (*Dinopium javanense malabaricum*)

Height of the shore just below 6000 feet, so it was probably the Three-toed and not the Benghalense tehminee.

#### FEEDING ADAPTABILITY OF HOUSE SPARROWS

Indra Kumar Sharma

I observed that the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) largely feeds its young on moths and other soft-bodied insects. But when these are lacking, the House Sparrows freely feed the chicks on petals of *Canna* and *Portulaca grandiflora* in my garden. Pieces of bread also form a part of the diet. There are several honey-bee combs in my garden, and the House Sparrow was observed feeding honey bee (*Apis indica*) also to the young. Occasionally it was observed feeding carpenter ants (*Camponotus* sp.) and the House Fly (*Musca domestica*) also. This shows the wide adaptability of the House Sparrow as far as food is concerned.



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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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*With compliments*

*of*

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NEW LETTER FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

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July 1976

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A DAY AT SULTANPUR

Shama Futehally

On Sunday 4th April, I went to the Sultanpur Jheel in Haryana with a little band of bird enthusiasts which included Dr. Salim Ali. Although it was April, the Delhi area was experiencing an unexpected 'cool' wave, and the sky was a welcome dull grey, in fact it was fairly nippy in the early morning when we arrived. From the well appointed rest house, a lawn slopes down to the jheel, and we began the search for birds while standing on the lawn and scanning the water. This alone was rewarding; it would not have seemed, from the appearance of the lake, that it was nearly the end of the season for migratory birds. The lake's centre contains some trees in the style of Bharatpur, and it was easy enough to make out Painted Storks performing their unbalanced landings on them. White Ibis and Grey Herons helped to crowd the islands. At the far end of the lake, a carpet of ducks massed together consisted of Shovellers and Shovellers only, but a long spell with the binoculars was rewarded by some Pintail in the middle distance, and a pair of Spothills hugging one of the islands. Again, to one side of the jheel was a large exhibit of Spoonbills.

Not everything however required to be peered at through the binoculars. Near us, on the edge of the lake, two or three Whiskered Terns and a Brownheaded Gull circled unceasingly. Some ladylike Blackwinged Stilts



picked their way in the water close by. As we began to skirt the lake, Streaked Fantail Warblers were much in evidence in the clumps of reeds, we also saw an Indian Wren Warbler and a couple of Collared Bush Chats. Yellow Wagtails darted, glided and trilled all round us, a Grey Friar huddled crossly on a wire, and a Goldenbacked Woodpecker was pretending that a telegraph pole was a tree. At this point I began to claim an Adjutant Stork in the middle of the lake, but had the sense to know when I was beaten. It was probably a log of wood. However, a White Stork in the paddy fields was unmistakable, so also a Marsh Harrier sailing about some way ahead. A Black Partridge called obsessively for a few minutes - it is the very distinctive cry which has been 'interpreted' as the Persian phrase 'shir-daram-shakarak' - an uncompromising call for milk and a little sugar. The Grey Partridge was also heard, and some invisible peafowl miaowed every now and again. A little further out in the field, Blackbellied Finch Larks shared honours with Indian Pipits. There were the inevitable Redwattled Lapwings and the inevitable Pariah Kite. A shrieking band of Roseringed Parakeets made for the trees on the rest house lawn, Ring Doves and Black Drongos appeared somewhere or other every now and again. And very far away at the furthest side of the lake and half hidden in the mist, were two little dots of grey and red - Sarus Cranes.

After this we went back to the rest house for breakfast, and immediately after breakfast, started to walk round the other side of the Lake, as the day was still cool. There were lots of good things on this other side, and first among them was a vast array of Ruff and Reeve not far from the bank. And then a stately convoy of Rosy Pelicans, sailed into view in the middle of the Lake. In the mud a Spotted Sandpiper and a Marsh Sandpiper bobbed about, as also a Fantail Snipe; a flock of Little Stints fed busily some distance inwards. After having seen many Whiskered Terns we now saw a Gullbilled; a few Whitethroated Munias on the grass, and Redrumped as well as Common Swallows. Directly overhead was the trilling of a small Indian Skylark, and crested larks dotted the stubble. Mynas were represented by the Pied and the Bank Mynas.

We now began to be aware that there were several more species of duck on the jheel than we had thought at first. A pair of Brahminy Duck mingled with the Shovellers, and we braved a herd of buffaloes - very large - to stand and stare at Gadwall, Wigeon and Common Teal. I ought to mention at this point that many shapes and sizes of Egrets were available, and presumably Large, Median and Little were all there, but we had better things to think about.

We came back from this second spell very satisfied, but also a little surprised at the absence of Coots, Cormorants and Little Grebe. In the event we were to see all three as we sat on the rest house verandah having tea. (The Cormorants were Large Cormorants). And an excellent finale to the day was when Dr. Salim Ali discovered and pointed out a

Whitebellied Heron. It was standing close to a Grey Heron, so its definitive white front could be easily made out in comparison to the other bird. It appears that this rare bird has been seen in Sultanpur before.

The Sultanpur Jheel is a richly rewarding area to visit. Perhaps the lake requires a few more planted 'islands' and it can be hoped that these will be artificially set up. Mr. Nalni Jayal, Joint Secretary, Wildlife and Forests - to whom, indeed, we were indebted for arranging the visit - made out a painstaking report to this effect in the Visitors' Book. And of course it has not been possible, so far, to hound out the poacher altogether. During our walk we met a young village woman who let us know that we too were there for this reasonable pursuit! When we told her we never ate 'jal-murgi' she asked, with the frankest curiosity, how we were all so fat?

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### SERIOUS BIRDWATCHING

L.A. Hill

It is some time since I have paid a subscription to the Newsletter and I therefore enclose a cheque for £4 which, at the present exchange rate of Rs.18.44, should cover me for a bit longer. A friend of mine, John McKelvie, who used to be with the British High Commission in Calcutta and is a keen and knowledgeable bird man, likes me to pass the Newsletters on to him, to keep him in the Indian picture, and we both greatly enjoy reading them.

Much water has passed under that proverbial bridge since you pointed out to me one day at Bolani in Orissa that the bird I had fondly believed for the previous 3 years to be a Fairy Bluebird was in fact a Malabar Whistling Schoolboy! Looking up the date in my diary I see that it was on 2nd Dec., 1965.

That occasion brought home to me, once again, that the more one learns about birds the more one realises what a vast amount more there is yet to learn.

After coming back to live in the U.K. in 1972 - I met you and your wife shortly afterwards here in London if you remember - I spent two years becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that I wasn't doing anything useful in the bird watching line: I was becoming rather disillusioned with the selfish attitude of the lone bird-watcher. I had an ever-increasing desire to try to contribute something - to become involved in some worthwhile task.

4.

I felt I'd had enough of being a common-or-garden bird-watcher: the sort of character who knows just enough about birds to make a walk in the country that much more interesting; who knows just about enough to recognise a bird event that is perhaps out of the ordinary; who ticks off the birds he sees and writes down religiously the date he first hears or sees a returning migrant, etc. etc.

When I tell people my hobby is birds, they usually laugh and then ask "What do you bird-watchers actually do?" and truth to tell I find myself stumped for a satisfactory answer. It might be informative to ask your readers for their definition of a bird-watcher - you might get some amusing and/or interesting replies!

I suppose one could say that the primary object in life of a bird-watcher, his main effort of "doing" something, is to identify the birds he sees, followed by the secondary activity of noting anything unusual in their behaviour. My own definition would therefore be: - "A bird-watcher is a rather odd person who derives satisfaction from seeking out and correctly naming our feathered friends and then prying into their private lives."

The enjoyment a bird-watcher gets out of his hobby depends much on the individual but I would imagine that with many it is based on:-

- (i) the aesthetic pleasure of actually watching birds in action and
- (ii) the motive it provides for visiting places that are off the beaten track, with the added excitement at times of overcoming travelling hazards or even of flirting with danger.

I remember an occasion some years ago in the Queen Elizabeth Park in Uganda, when the man who first introduced me to the delights of this particular hobby - would you call him my "guru"? - was driving through the park with myself, my wife and my daughter, then aged six. We stopped at one point to look at a small flock of flamingoes on the edge of a saltlake: they were too far away for us to make out through the glasses whether they were Greater or Lesser Flamingo and the heat haze did not help matters. Since Greater had never been seen before in that area, the "guru" and I decided to walk over for a closer look.

We had only gone some 200 yards when a herd of twelve elephants appeared out of nowhere and sauntered past between us and the car. I was amused later when my wife told me of my daughter's concern, and her comments: - "Oh, why did you let them go, Mummy?" followed by "I wish this was a film and not real life" and ending, with true regard for family loyalty "If the elephants get them I hope they get Mr. Robinson and not Daddy!" We were not unduly perturbed by the elephants, but our hearts suddenly appeared in our mouths and started to thump a bit when a lone bull buffalo, started from its siesta in a mud wallow behind a clump of bushes, suddenly sprang to its feet and lumbered off a few yards before turning round to

give us a very dirty look down its nose. However, it was all worthwhile as we were able to add Greater Flamingoes to the Park check list.

On another occasion, we were stealthily stalking a Shoe-billed Stork in the Murchison Falls Park to try and get a good photo of it, when we trod on a sleeping hippo. All concerned got a fearsome fright! I can't answer for the hippo but I know that it took some time for my and my "guru's" heartbeats to return to normal.

All of which goes to show that bird-watchers, when following their natural bent, and in their normal course of duty, often tend to become involved in situations which would be regarded by more normal right-minded and sane individuals as bordering on the ridiculous.

However, to get back to the beginning again, I have now gone some way to solving my personal problem by becoming involved in two activities which make one feel one is actually doing something useful. These are:-

- (i) Bird ringing
- (ii) Registering on Ornithological Sites. I'm sure you know a great deal about both activities, but just in case you might like to have a bit of additional fodder for one of your future Newsletters, I will give you a very very personal and general idea of what these activities entail.

Bird Ringing: There are basically, I suppose, two objectives:-

- (i) To catch and study birds in the hand. This is done to record facts on weight, sex and age (where possible), wing length, moult, etc. etc.
- (ii) To ring them. From recoveries of rings from dead birds, or "controls" (i.e. information from other ringers who have caught the ringed birds) information is obtained on migration, life expectancy, manner of death, etc.

In the U.K. the granting of ringing permits is watched over very strictly by the Government through the Nature Conservancy Council of the Ministry of the Environment.

Basically, there are three types of permits:-

- Trainee
- "C"
- "A" and "B".

All have to have a licence from the Nature Conservancy Council, renewable annually, before a permit can be granted by the B.T.O. (British Trust for Ornithology) Ringing and Migration Section.

A Trainee must have removed from mist nets and ringed at least 500 birds of some 25 species before he can be considered for a "C" permit. He/she



must do all this under the watchful eye of an "A" or "B" permit holder who has had his permit at least 4 years and who has been granted a special endorsement to train beginners.

People with "C" permits are allowed to purchase their own nets, etc. and to work on their own, but their trainer must supply the rings and is still held responsible for their activities. Only when they have caught and ringed and "processed" a further 500 birds, and when their trainer is convinced they are suitable, can they be considered for an "A/3" permit. They are then "ornithological-knowledge" tested by a competent person other than their trainer before they can receive the "A" or "B" permit.

There is no difference in standard between an "A" or a "B" ringer. "A"s buy their own rings and operate alone: "B"s belong to a group which buys the rings and operates communally.

This gives a general picture of the ringing set-up: almost all ringers are, of course, amateurs and I believe they number about 1,000 or so in the U.K. The B.T.O. has a professional staff to administer the whole scheme, and to handle and store the data.

Handling birds is an art which has to be learned. Taking birds out of mist nets needs care, patience and experience; some of the smaller and more active ones, such as Blue Tits and Wrens, can get themselves snarled up in weird and wondrous ways and removing them without causing injury is difficult for the inexperienced.

Blue Tits are great fighters and you can usually tell when a ringer is extracting one by the "Ooos" and "Ouches" and similar expressions of pain that come from his direction.

Mist nets, which come in various sizes of mesh and fineness of strand, have to be set with great care, taking into account many factors: a large bird like a Pheasant or a Partridge can go right through a fine net like a cannonball, while cows, or people on bicycles, can cause absolute havoc. The nets have to be constantly supervised as birds should not be left long before collection: in the net they can fall an easy prey to predators.

The mist nets can vary in length and height, but normally they can be 40 or 60 feet long with 4 or 5 horizontal wires about 18" apart. The ends of the wires are looped over bamboo poles which are firmly anchored and guyed back to draw the wires taut. The net is fixed to the horizontal wires, but is not taut: it hangs loosely from each wire to the one below, so that a "pocket" is formed all the way along the lower wire. When a bird flies in to the "invisible" net, it falls down into the pocket and becomes enmeshed.

There are of course many other permitted methods of catching birds: Chardonneret Traps (small wire cages with a trip which closes the door when a bird enters); Holigoland Traps (vast "post and wire" open-ended



funnels into which birds fly - or walk or swim - and which narrow down to a catching box arrangement); there are even cannon-propelled nets for catching roosting waders and other water birds.

At the moment I am still a Trainee ringer although I have extracted from mist nets and ringed nearly 500 birds of 30 different species, but I'm looking forward to the time I get my "C" permit and can operate on my own.

I have decided to wait till the end of this year before applying for it: I want to attend a week's ringing instruction course at the Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory at the northern entrance to the Wash, in September: this is one of several courses arranged by the B.T.O. By then I will have been a Trainee for 2 years and should have handled about 1,000 birds.

One of the great things about ringing is that you often catch, and then have to identify, small birds that the normal bird-watcher often doesn't even see. When he does see them, he tends to dismiss them as "horrid little brown jobs" and goes on to look for something more exotic and exciting - at least this, I am ashamed to say, is what I used to do!

So you have to become more knowledgeable, since one of the main rules for a ringer is that he shouldn't ring a bird unless he knows what it is. In England, in my very limited experience, these "little brown birds" turn out to be Sedge Warblers, Reed Warblers, Blackcaps and other such delightful bunches of feathers.

There can be excitement at catching a rarity, or some bird with a foreign ring: there can be admiration when you catch the same Sedge Warbler several times just before it starts its long haul to Central Africa and find that it has doubled its weight in 3 weeks, from 10 to 20 grammes. (they must put away a vast amount of aphids in this short time).

By the time they complete their migration journey, they will have lost 50% of their starting weight and will be down to 10 grammes again. (I'm trying to lose 33,000 grammes in weight, or 7% of my total, so I suppose the lesson is clear - stop eating for two weeks and walk the equivalent distance.)

Sometimes rather extraordinary facts come to life. My trainer, Dr. A.B. Watson, arranged with John McKelvie to ring garden birds in the latter's garden: he has a very pleasant bungalow with quite a large garden set in woodlands, and he and his Parsi wife Koomi feed the birds in the winter time. Perhaps the most common birds are Blue Tits, but also coming to feed when food is scarce in the wild are Great Tits, Coal Tits, Marsh Tits, Dunnocks, Greenfinches, Bullfinches, Tree Creepers, Nuthatches, Wrens, Robins, Siskins, Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, etc. Anyway, John and Koomi were under the impression that about 20-30 Blue Tits were coming along daily as welcome guests to their bird tables: that first day of ringing to everyone's surprise, they caught over 80!

All in all, I find ringing a fascinating experience, and have added very greatly to my knowledge of birds in the short time I have been involved with it.

### Register of Ornithological Sites

The following is quoted from the B.T.O. pamphlet on the purpose of the scheme, which was started some three years ago:-

"We live in an age when man is modifying and actively utilising our semi-natural habitats at an ever increasing rate. Land is ever vanishing under industrial growth, housing and motorways, holiday camps and rubbish tips, and commercial forestry is replacing much moorland and deciduous woodland.

The ornithological interest of relatively few places has been fully documented and consequently adequate information about the bird-life of threatened sites is often not available until the development reaches an advanced stage of planning...

The "Sites Register" will ensure that conservationists and planners will have in their possession objective assessments of the ornithological value of sites before they actually start any detailed work, and these assessments will be of tremendous use in long-term environmental planning.

Already the provisional results are proving of value."

In effect, the B.T.O. will be able to state, quite objectively:- "O.K. You put a motorway through here and you will destroy the only known U.K. breeding habitat of the last existing colony of Lesser Red-rumped, Long-tailed, Blue-bellied Warblers." You may remember all the fuss and bother over the proposed Maplin Airport on the marshes off the East coast, which would have destroyed, inter alia, a large proportion of the winter feeding areas of the Brent Goose.

The B.T.O. are hoping to complete the scheme by the end of this year, but still have many areas, which they have classified as being of ornithological interest, undocumented. For this reason they have recently instigated a final frantic recruitment drive for willing volunteers.

I would think that many people have fought shy of becoming involved because they have felt that their knowledge of birds is not really up to the task, and this certainly applied to me.

However, in a "weak" moment I succumbed two months ago to the recruitment flurry, and I must say that I am very glad indeed that I did so. It has increased my knowledge of birds tremendously, quite apart from giving me a pleasurable feeling of doing something useful - thus killing (if as an ardent conservationist you will pardon the expression) two birds with one stone.

I have been given a site, near my home in Chichester, which is about 2 miles long by a mile across. It consists of woods, arable and grazing farmland with many mature hedgerows and small coppices, and has a small reed-fringed lake in the centre: the River Ems, dry now for over a year, "runs" along one side of the area.

Although it is a very small area, it is surprising how difficult it is to recognise and count everything in it that flies! I have been fortunate in finding a willing helper in the guise of an 18-year old tractor driver who works on a nearby farm and who is very knowledgeable indeed on birds. Between us we put in about 12 man-hours a week in walking around the site. I can only manage Saturdays, but, he, since he lives on the edge of our area, can get around during week day evenings also.

After two months we proudly consider ourselves to be the world experts on the feathered fauna of our particular patch! And this, for what it is worth, is of course true. It gives us a splendidly inflated idea of our own importance in the Universe.

At present our knowledge is confined to what goes on in Spring and early Summer, but by December, when our report must be submitted, we will have a very reasonable idea of the Autumn passage migrants and the Winter visitors such as Fieldfares and Redwings, and perhaps some interesting ducks on our little lake.

The trees have come into full leaf since we started and we now have to rely more and more on song. My knowledge in this respect has been abysmal since, not having a musical ear, I have never seriously bothered myself with it. But now I find that it is absolutely essential to recognise the noises, since it is often so difficult to actually see many of the woodland birds in Summer. (I suppose almost everyone who lives in the country in England has heard the cuckoo, but I would hazard a guess that not more than one person in every thousand has actually seen one! I have heard two on my patch this last month but have so far failed to see the brutes.) I managed to borrow some gramophone records on bird song recently and this has helped. It would possibly seem incredible to many U.K. birdwatchers if they were to know that it is only in the past five weeks that I have been able to identify our commonest philloscopi by song - Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Wood Warbler. And that's just about the only way they can be differentiated, unless you have them in the hand.

I see by the way that I noted in my diary when you visited Bolani in December, 1965 how impressed I was, not only with your ability to recognise bird calls, but also to mimic them!

So far, my young friend and I have recorded 60 different species and are beginning to have a fairly good idea of the numbers of each. We are also aware that there are several of the more reticent types around which we have not yet seen nor heard - some of the owls for instance, and also Woodcock and Nightjars.

I find it all so absorbing I only wish I had started a couple of years ago. Climatic changes occur over the years and these can have a dramatic affect of course on the bird-life - right now we are in a period of abnormal drought, and many of the streams are dry. It's only over a fairly prolonged period of time that one can obtain a really true picture of the situation.

Well, Zafar, there you are. This has turned out to be a lengthy epistle and I have only attempted to illustrate how important it has been, in my own particular case, to get away from the normal bird-watching rut into a situation where there is some - albeit not very much - involvement! How I wish I had started years ago.

METHOD OF PREYING IN THE GREY-SHRIKE, LANIUS EXCUBITOR (LINN.)  
IN THE RAJASTHAN DESERT

A.P. Jain

In the course of our survey of the desert biome of Rajasthan I have once had an occasion to observe the method of preying in the Grey-Shrike, Lanius excubitor (Linn.) at Maulasar (Dist. Nagaur). A large sized specimen of Calotes versicolor was creeping down the stem of a Khejri tree (Prosopis cineraria). As soon as it stepped on the ground, it was grasped powerfully by a shrike which was resting on a nearby branch and within no time, the bird with its powerful beak, destroyed both the eyes of that lizard one by one. The Calotes was struggling hard for its life when the shrike gave two or three forceful strokes of its beak at the base of the victim's brain to paralyse it. The lizard soon became motionless.

In another instance, when I was recording observations on the radiant heat energy absorption by rodents at Central Research Farm of this Institute, located at Jodhpur, I noticed a desert gerbil, Meriones hurrianae (Jerdon) in the grip of a shrike. The rodent's dorsum was lying on the sand deposited at the mouth of its burrow opening (these gerbils do not, usually, leave the vicinity of their burrows for purposes of feeding etc.). Since this particular gerbil happened to be subject of my observations, I scared the shrike away. After this the male desert gerbil staggered and entered the burrow opening and was not seen any more in the field. Possibly some internal injury had occurred which ended its life. The shrike sat on the branch of a ber (Zizyphus nummularia) bush underneath which the burrow of the gerbil was present.



## DISAPPEARING KITES

Shivraj Kumar Khacher

The Common Pariah Kite was formerly an exceedingly common bird in Jasdan and the surrounding villages. Birds were very bold and used to snatch food articles from persons if they were not careful when carrying them in the bazaar. Since last year I have noticed a very steep decline in the numbers of the Common Pariah Kite here and today there are few if any birds in Jasdan and the surrounding villages of the Taluka. This must be due to the widespread use of rat poison to kill off the plague of rats which is here and the Kites must have eaten the poisonous rats with disastrous results to themselves. It would be interesting to know what the position is in other parts of Gujarat and if this decline in numbers is widespread over a larger area.

## CROW'S CACHE (CORVUS SPLENDENS)

M.B. Krishna

This is with reference to the question "Has any of the readers seen crows hiding food in cracks and crevices of buildings and trees?" raised by Mr. Debashis Ray in his article "Crow's Cache (Corvus splendens)" which appeared in the June issue of the Newsletter.

On the third of March 1976, (Time: 6-10 p.m.) I saw a Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) hide a piece of flesh in a crevice on a mango tree and then fly away. However, the flesh was not completely hidden, but was visible from a distance. The next evening I could not see it.

## ONSET OF "BRAIN FEVER"

Commenting on the notes under this heading in Nos. 3 & 5 of the Newsletter, Sri Sureshwar Gupta of 153, DE, Sir Syed St., Khageul, Patna 801105, wrote a long and detailed letter, the gist of which is:

"I am giving some information about the Brain Fever bird (Cuculus varius) in Bihar (Monghyr & Patna Districts) from my daily notes. In Jamalpur (Monghyr Dt.) where I lived from 1966 to 1974, the Brain Fever Bird is very common, and its calls are heard all the year round. My diary shows that I have heard the bird in February, March, May, July, August and November during the period February 1974 to May 1976 (in Jamalpur, Khageul and Patna). Therefore, Mr. Ramamoorthy's concluding remark appears to me to be quite correct."



## AT HOME

I am happy to welcome any birdwatcher at my residence on Sundays, preferably with prior intimation, to discuss the possibilities of birding and bird photography in and around Madras. Light refreshments will be offered. Visitors are at liberty to make use of my mini library consisting of Guy Mountfort, Lowther, Eric Hosking, G.K. Yeats, Eha and other useful books besides back issues of our Newsletter.

T. Koneri Rao  
318 T.H. Road  
(Near Tamilnad Theatre)  
Madras 600 081.

Mr. Nikhil Bakshi, Secretary, The Wildlife Conservation Society of Bhavnagar, Savinaya Society, Behind Patel Park, Bhavnagar 364001, writes to say that readers who would like to watch birds in and around Bhavnagar are welcome to stay with for a few days. A letter in advance would make things easier.

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## OUR HERITAGE...

the tiger by the water hole; the elephant in the forest; bison crossing a road; lions in the Gir forest; rhinos in Assam. What more valuable heritage can we have? This heritage of ours is priceless. But is being steadily destroyed. Protect our heritage...our wild life.



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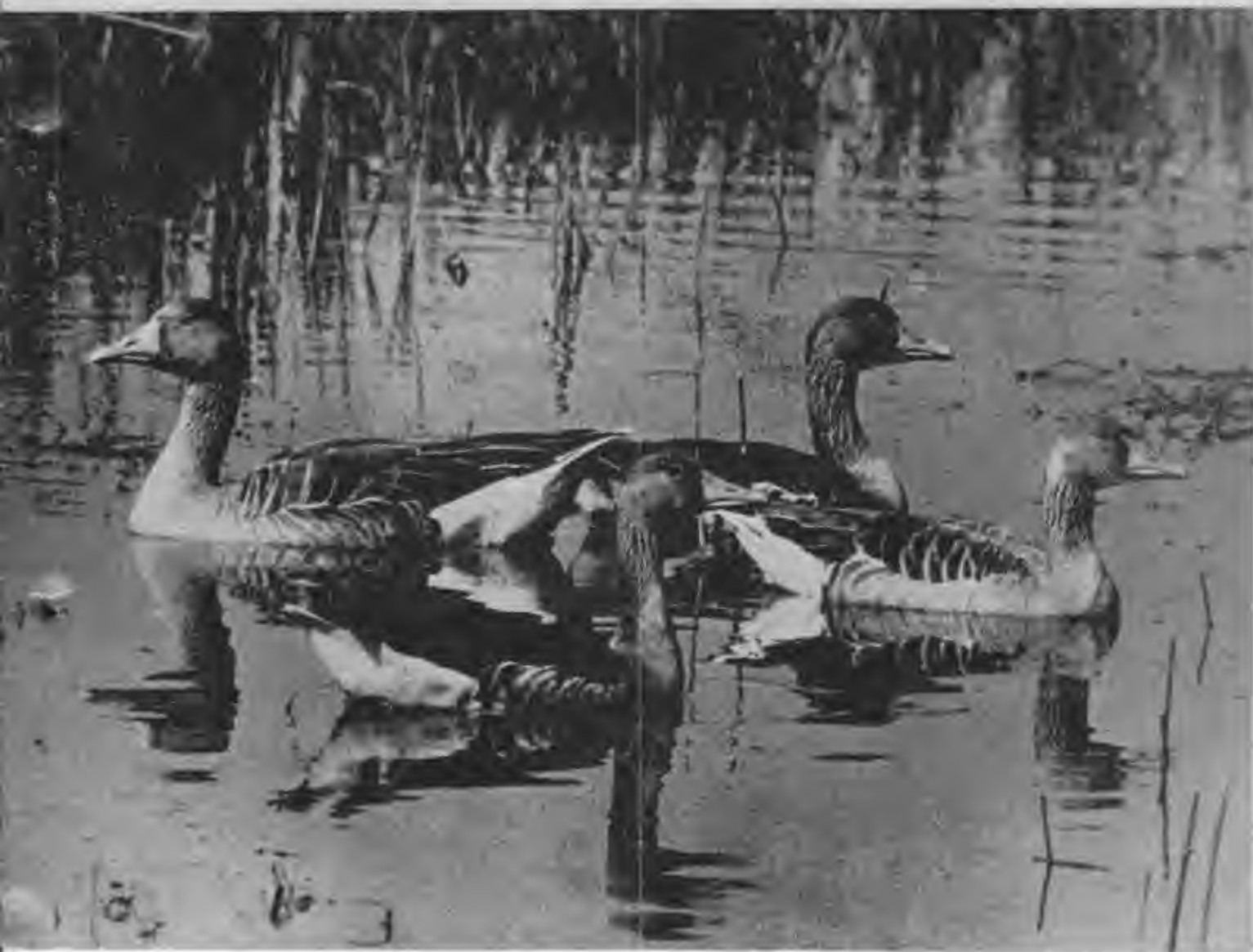
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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XVI NO. 8 AUGUST 1976.







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NEWSLETTER FOR  
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SUBSCRIPTIONS

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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SERIOUS BIRDWATCHING

Kumer D. Ghorpade

"If I have succeeded in my inquiries, more than others, I owe it less to any superior strength of mind, than to a habit of patient thinking." -- SIR ISAAC NEWTON

The article by L.A. Hill on Serious Birdwatching in the July issue prompts me to write in a similar vein.

A keen birdwatcher with an inclination more towards scientific inquiry than on passive observation, will always set aside some time for reflection; a period of intelligent contemplation, on some phase or aspect of Ornithology that intrigues or puzzles him and makes him think. It may be something he has seen on one of his field outings, or some statement he has recently read or heard from a second person. Whatever it may be, he always comes across innumerable problems on which he ponders in solitude, consults written works or discusses it with other ornithologists.

Since the first installment of these musings appeared in the Newsletter / 10(7): 3-5, 1970/, a lot of water has flown in the river of thought (and time). Much driftwood has however accumulated, which I offer to our readers to help rekindle the lamp of learning. Such musings, ideas and reflections which I feel should be communicated to some purpose are set out in this article and will form the substance of future parts.

In my Critique [Newsletter 13(8): 1-5, 1973], I had indicated some studies that birdwatchers in India could undertake which would contribute substantially to the broader plan of increasing the existing knowledge on the birds of our subcontinent. One of these was the preparation of a faunistic list of bird species occurring in each of the nearly 250 districts of the Indian Union (some 130 more districts if Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, the other countries of our subcontinent, are included), by individual birdwatchers, preferably resident in the concerned district, who would have to maintain copious notes on each species on all aspects of its natural history, like status, local movements, habitat, food, behaviour, nesting, etc. I had also attempted to bring to notice, the fact that many gaps in our knowledge of the life history and bionomics of the bird-life of our area are still present which is substantiated by the lacunae in Drs. Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley's superb HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA & PAKISTAN, now complete in ten volumes. I would like to stress here that the obliteration of these gaps are the joint responsibility of all birdwatchers stationed in the Indian Subcontinent and that the Newsletter should collect all the "stray feathers" of information from them and in time become the main repository of such data which would be available to anyone seeking it. After all, whatever one may think about it and however insignificant its present role may be, I am certain that the Newsletter will graduate one day into a first class ornithological journal meant for India and adjacent countries.

Presumably the above facts are already realized by the rank and file of birdwatchers in our area, and this may seem a needless repetition to many. But mere awareness of the current state of Ornithology in India is, to my mind, not enough. I have come to consider the science of bird study as a sort of jig-saw puzzle, the difference being that before fitting the pieces into their correct places on the board, one first has to search for them in the vast wonderland that is nature. In the preface to the first volume of his celebrated journal, Stray Feathers, Allan Octavian Hume, the 'father' of Indian Ornithology, wrote (in 1873) --

"No special scientific knowledge is necessary for the preparation of local faunas -- a man has to only collect steadily in almost any locality for a year or eighteen months, one or two specimens of every species he can come across in his neighbourhood to note, so far as practicable, in regard to each whether they are rare or common, whether they are permanent residents or seasonal visitants, and if the latter, when they arrive, and when they leave; whether they breed in his neighbourhood, and if so, when; what their nests are like, where they are situated, how they are composed, how many eggs they lay and what these are like, and what their dimensions are; what the nestlings and what the young birds are like; what localities and what food the birds affect, and, even if he does all this very, very imperfectly in regard to a vast number of species, he will still (after his birds have been identified) possess materials for a most useful and instructive local avifauna, such as the most critical professed ornithologist will welcome cordially."

Even though a century has gone by since these words were written and the known facts on Indian birds have grown, much of what Hume wrote is still required today. It may not be necessary nowadays to actually collect birds in order to identify them, even though systematic collections of birds in India would still like to acquire particular species and/or "subspecies" from some areas unrepresented in their museum. It is now almost certain that all the species of birds occurring in our subcontinent have been discovered and described. However, as regards the distribution, ecology and field biology of these species in our area, much is still to be brought to light. Most of the information available on Indian birds in literature has obviously been procured by the various short, seasonal, bird surveys undertaken in selected regions of our country, mainly by Dr. Salim Ali. Taxonomically of great value, these regional surveys (mainly of the erstwhile Princely States) and seasonal lists presented a very patchy picture of the composite bird-life of those areas. Further, the correct status of each bird in the area and its local movements and population fluctuations during different months of the year can only be accumulated by an ornithologist (a 'glorified' name for a birdwatcher, really) residing in that area for a number of years and maintaining a thorough record of the activities and biometrics of the birds of the tract.

Every birdwatcher in our subcontinent should collect as much information as possible on the bird species of his district, and, when sufficient data has accumulated, make this known to others through the pages of a reputed scientific journal like the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, or our own Newsletter for Birdwatchers, which, hopefully, would have transformed itself to something more than just a newsletter by that time. Later, this 'District Avifauna' could be added to or corrected and updated through suitable supplementary papers either by the district bird-man himself or by others who have had a chance to do some field work in that district themselves. If such systematized knowledge on the birds of each Indian district were available, it would indeed be a great step ahead for Indian Ornithology and a much steadier base for building further studies on our birds. What these further studies could be and how we must go about working on them is admirably elaborated in this extract from Dr. Salim Ali's THE BIRDS OF KERALA (1968) --

"... It is unlikely that many bird species inhabiting Kerala or visiting the country as regular seasonal migrants have escaped enumeration, or that any novelties still remain to be discovered and described hence. Therefore energy may now be profitably directed into more promising channels. We still have a great deal to learn about the life-history and ecology of almost all our birds. These are subjects that cannot be studied from dead skins in a museum no matter how large or complete a collection is available. Neither can they get adequate justice from short seasonal field surveys with limited time and opportunities such as have necessarily formed the basis of this book. Only continuous, intensive field work combined with intelligent experimental and laboratory research

are likely to produce the desired results. This implies patient and methodical observation, accurate recording, careful indexing and sifting of the records, and intelligent co-ordination and interpretation of the data.

"These processes cannot begin or function satisfactorily without, in the first instance, a correct identification of the bird concerned. With the aid of this handbook it is hoped that the reader-- especially one who is fortunate enough to be residing in the pleasant places away from the haunts of man--will be enabled to make a beginning towards the filling of some of the glaring gaps in our knowledge of Indian birds.

"So little has been recorded about the living bird that almost any notes will be welcome. Information is particularly lacking concerning the habitats in which different birds live, the factors that limit certain species to certain types of habitat; how changes in habitat, brought about by human agency or natural causes, affect the composition of the bird life and the status and populations of its various components. We want precise information about the local migrations of various species, and about the factors upon which these movements depend. We want specific data on the food and feeding habits of birds: what quantity each individual consumes of each food item in different seasons and habitats, and at different stages of its life. It is important to determine by periodical censuses the population strength of a given species in a given habitat and thus be able to evaluate the true extent of the good or harm that a species does to agriculture, forestry, and other human interests and thereupon to devise adequate measures for its encouragement or control.

"In the years to come the importance of this branch of bird study, known as Economic Ornithology, is bound to receive due recognition in our country--as it has received long since in the West. Therefore apart from the purely aesthetic and morphological angles from which Indian birds have so far been looked at, it is necessary that their utilitarian aspect should also be studied. A very large proportion of species eat insects, the vast majority of which are injurious in the highest degree to agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and allied human industry. Insectivorous birds exercise a very effective control upon insect pests. Owls and the diurnal birds of prey keep a check on the increase of field rats and mice and other vermin. Frugivorous birds are important agents in the dissemination of seeds and in extending the distribution of plants over vast stretches of country. The valuable sandalwood tree in South India, for example, is largely propagated by birds. Other species are specially adapted for a diet of flower nectar in obtaining which they, like bees, do considerable service in cross-pollinating and fertilizing flowers. The activities of some species on the



other hand are largely destructive and harmful to man's interests, and the purpose of Economic Ornithology is to strike an accurate balance sheet between the harm and the good that different species do by making complete life-history and ecological studies. It is obvious that in a country like ours, so largely dependent upon agriculture and forestry, the role played by birds is of the highest economic consequence."

I feel I must correct Dr. Salim Ali's belief that the 'vast majority' of insects are injurious in the 'highest degree' to man's economy. In fact, the reverse is true: the vast majority of the nearly two to three million species of insects estimated to share the earth with us are not injurious to our interests, being either highly beneficial to us or not affecting us at all in any way. Of the 75,000 species of insects so far described and known from our subcontinent, hardly 300 could be categorized as serious pests and the total number of species in our area that have been reported as having attacked man's crops, his livestock or other possessions, or man himself, would not in any case be more than 3000. I leave it to you to work out the percentages for yourself.

Coming back to the subject of this article, I must caution my birdwatcher colleagues that before we tackle the more detailed investigations on our bird species that Dr. Salim Ali advocated in the passage reproduced above, one must preferably complete the drawing up of a preliminary list of the avifauna of his district, and the bare minimum of the status and habitat of each species indicated in the checklist. The birdwatcher should have collected notes on the birds of his district over a minimum period of two years at least, for the list to be somewhat tolerably representative of the area, before it could be submitted for inclusion in the Newsletter or published formally in the Journal of the B.N.H.S. or some similar reputed scientific periodical. My own effort has been on the avifauna of Sandur and other parts of Bellary district / J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 70(3): 499-531, 1974/, and I am well on the way to compiling similar papers on the birds of Bangalore and Reichur districts (Karnataka). As models I would suggest consulting works on any of the regional areas listed in the HANDBOOK Volume 10 (pages 271-272), especially those on the birds of Bombay and Salsette (JBNHS vols. 39 & 40, 1936-39), Delhi and district (JBNHS 47: 277-300, 1947), Coorg (JBNHS vol. 50, 1951), Darbhanga district (JBNHS vols. 13-16, 1901-04) and Simla and adjacent hills (JBNHS vol. 47, 1947-48).

Perhaps such lists, if not for whole districts, at least for towns and taluks, have been roughly prepared and are in the possession of some of our readers for their own use. Or some of us may have been maintaining such notes and checklists for a number of years without having thought of arranging all this information species-wise for publication. I implore every one of you who have such lists ready or even half-ready to send them after careful preparation to the Newsletter, so that your colleagues and ultimately Indian Ornithology may benefit. The appearance of such lists



in periodicals like our Newsletter, which has a fairly wide circulation among most birdwatchers worth the name in our country, would certainly provoke criticism, supplementary information, additions, corrections, etc., from other birders stationed in India and such constructive discussions would most definitely have a beneficial effect on bird study in this country.

The above rigmarole and the contents of my earlier "Critique" may have seemed very pedantic, idealistic and somewhat utopian to most readers; and if so I crave their indulgence. I was prompted to put my thoughts and feelings on Indian bird-study, or rather the lack of it, on paper and to bring to your notice how much still remains to be done on bird fauna and how little, how slow, has been our effort to fill the gaps in the knowledge of the avifauna of our rich (natural wealth-wise) subcontinent. Other drawbacks are the minimal number of scientifically inclined or sufficiently motivated birdwatchers in the country, and the paucity of adequate coordination, cooperation and collective effort among such persons here. In closing, may I be permitted to say (with due apologies to Dr. Salim Ali -- Newsletter 13(9): 10, 1973) --

"We must learn to walk before we can run,  
but we must also learn to work before we can have fun!"

#### AT A BUSTARD'S NEST

S.G. Neginhal

On May 11th, 1976, myself, my Conservator Sri S.K. Veradaraj and my colleague Sri D.N. Venkatraman, were at the Ranibennur Blackbuck Sanctuary of Dharwar District, Karnataka State. It was 3.30 p.m. and we had just arrived after visiting the Bhadra and Jegervallay Sanctuaries of Shimoga District, and we wanted to see as many Blackbucks and Bustards as possible in the Sanctuary.

We saw herds of Blackbuck grazing and galloping in the open forest areas. Blackbuck is a most graceful animal and its arrow-like leap into air while running is a feast for the eyes.

We were however more eager to see the "Yereladdu" birds - Great Indian Bustards (*Choriotis nigricaps*) that are breeding here. We cut across a Eucalyptus plantation of Hullatti block and went to the maiden area, ripped and furrowed recently for afforestation. We walked slowly, scanning the blanks for spotting out the Bustards. Suddenly just in front of us a Bustard (*Choriotis nigricaps*) flushed and flew away followed by another Bustard from the same spot. On trying to follow the birds we found a nest at the spot from where the two birds had taken off. The nest was formed by light brushing of a hard murremy strip of 4 feet width flanked on either side by two furrows, ripped last month for afforestation. In the nest a slightly bigger than a tennis ball sized egg of the Bustard

was found. It was oval and deep brown or buff in colour. Naturally we were delighted to see this Bustard egg for very few have seen this. We photographed the egg and left the spot. After jeeping about a mile through a Eucalyptus plantation we came across a vast grassy area with slopes and small elevations forming mounds. On seeing us another pair of Great Indian Bustards started moving and soon took to their wings. We also saw here a covey of six common Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*) and a few Indian Courgers (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) and a beautiful fox. As it was getting dark we called it a day.

Next day we were at the field at 6 a.m. slowly we stepped towards the nest of the Bustard spotted the day before yesterday. The two parent bustards saw us and flew away. The egg was there. It was decided that I should sit in a hide to photograph the bustards. Sri Nagraj, the young and energetic Range Forest Officer, immediately put up a hide under a nearby Eucalyptus sapling by fixing four posts and covering and camouflaging it with green Eucalyptus branches and leaves. I was left in this hide and all went away to a far off block to spot other bustards. It was 7.00 a.m.

From 7.00 a.m. to 7.45 a.m. there was no sign of the parent bustards. I was ready with my camera. From my hide I could see the egg of the Bustards - a deep brown ball perfectly camouflaging with the colour of the surrounding pebbles and the furrowed soil. There was dead silence everywhere. I was looking at the horizons for any sign of the birds. At 7.45 a.m. I saw one head of a Bustard moving like a snake, quite far off. Another head soon followed it. The body was not seen. It was covered by the sloping ground. They went up and down the slopy ground scanning the portion of the ground where their nest was situated. They were about 250 ft. away. Very cautiously both the birds started walking slowly towards the nest. The female was leading and the male was following. The female while moving continuously gave low barkings as if to assure the male that the way was clear. Slowly the female started coming nearer its nest followed by the male. Both started giving assuring calls in the form of low barkings to each other. They were about 10 ft. apart and the female was leading with extremely watchful eyes and steps. The male appeared to be more timid and the female went on reassuring it as the latter neared the nest. The female was very suspicious of the hide and was always looking sharply at it. Both were now giving reassuring calls and were hardly 50 feet away from the nest. I could not focus my camera as the hide was completely covered over by leaves and I did not wish to disturb the birds by turning aside a twig or two to make way for my camera. The female, which was smaller in size, came very near followed by the male and went and sat on the egg. It kept its face towards my hide and the male was standing beside it. Both were reassuring each other. While sitting on the egg for incubation the female first put the egg under its breast and then put its stomach portion on it. It was still suspicious of the hide and always kept looking at it. The male was standing within 4 feet of the nest and was keeping watch. It was 8.00 a.m. now. I did

not move and wished to forego my prized photo rather than disturb such a lovely pair of bustards fully engaged in their duty of procreation. Suddenly something frightened the female and in split of a second it got up issuing out an alarm call (a quick barking!) and flew away. Simultaneously the male also flew away giving a frightened call. The female flew and sat near an Acacia bush, about 200 feet away and was well within my view. But the male was more frightened and flew far away and could not be seen. After some time the female walked away.

At 9.30 a.m. the pair reappeared about 250 feet away and after walking and perambulating they disappeared. I got away from the hide at 11.00 a.m. and returned after lunch at Ranibennur about 5 miles away. When I re-entered the hide it was 4 p.m. The day was very hot and nimbus clouds were gathering in the sky. Soon winds started blowing and it was sure to rain heavily. I was worried of my camera. I packed and kept it in a rexin hand bag and was getting ready to retreat from the hide. Soon I saw the two bustards walking up and down 250 feet away. I hastened to leave the place before the bustards could spot me, so that they may not be frightened. Again the Bustards disappeared and I got out of the hide and moved away in the opposite direction towards Ranibennur. There were a few drops of rain and the sky was overcast with rain-laden clouds. The sun had set and it was getting dusk.

The next day I again went to the nest at 6.30 a.m. but to my horror the egg was not there. Bustards were not seen. No egg shells were noticed. There was no sign of any damage to the egg. The nest ground was very clean and dry. It had not rained the previous night although it threatened to pour. What had happened? No human beings had come as my water bag was still safe in the hide. I had seen yesterday some minute blisters at one end of the egg. So was the egg ready to hatch? or the mother Bustard had hastened the hatching? Usually birds do not leave the egg shells near their nests after the eggs hatch to hood-wink predators. So I came to the conclusion that the egg had hatched the previous night. I searched for the chick but in vain. Got into the hide and waited till 11.00 a.m. but the Bustards did not turn up. I wished a long, long life to the chick and returned.

#### Some facts and conclusions about Bustards:

1. Size and colour of egg - length 5" and diameter 3" approximately. Colour deep brown.
2. The Bustards do not directly come flying and settle on the egg for incubating. They walk up carefully to their nest and then settle to incubate the egg.
3. The female leads the male to the nest.
4. The female is more brave and the male is timid.

5. The male gives company to the female while the latter is incubating and stands by the female as a watcher (Does the cock oblige its other hens likewise as it is polygamous?)
6. Only the female incubates the egg.
7. Both male and female take care of the egg.
8. This egg was laid after the 14th, April 1976, the date of ripping of this site. The egg was sighted on 11th May 1976. So the incubation period appears to be about 3 weeks.

#### CORRESPONDENCE:

##### AN INTERESTING DOUBLE-NEST

K.K. Neelakantan

In three days (16th to 18th of April, 1975) at Top Slip and Parambikulam (Kerala-Tamil Nadu border) I had found 2 nests of the Malabar Grey Hornbill, and one each of the Racket-tailed Drongo and the Blackcapped Babbler. And at each of these I spent some time watching the owners. Yet much more thrilling was the discovery of a mysterious double nest which had been deserted by the owners.

It was late in the evening on the 18th. Very heavy and black clouds had come up, and my companion (Mr Sathes Chendran Nair) and I were arguing for and against continuing our walk. We forgot our argument and our proposed destination when we noticed a large ball of grass on a small bush beside the road.

Just 6 feet above the ground and fixed to the slender twigs almost at the top of a short bamboo clump was this long, oval ball of fine grass stems and bamboo leaves. It had a short and ragged tubular entrance on one side. Perched on this was a shallow saucer-shaped twig nest, composed mostly of mimosa stems.

The grass nest was like an oval round-bottomed flask resting on its side. The 'bottom' of the flask was almost all bamboo leaves. It was beyond doubt a munia's nest. The dimensions of the twig nest were 6" x 5" with a depth of 3". It was made of thin twigs or creeper stems which had been bent and very loosely interwoven. There was no lining inside. I thought only a Spotted Dove could have built such a nest. Though Spotted Doves were fairly well distributed in this area, I did not come across any Munias during this trip.

On an earlier visit, in July 1973, however, I did see a few Whitebacked Munias at one spot near the main dam. And that was an unforgettable experience: because a pair of these Munias had chosen to build their nest inside an electric siren! Into the very larynx of the banshee - which



used to shake the surrounding hills three or four times every day with its eerie wailing - the munias were very diligently conveying dry bamboo leaves.

I don't know who showed better sense: the officials who had permitted such a powerful siren to be installed right in the heart of a wildlife sanctuary, or the poor munias which had elected to raise a brood within the siren.

#### AIRLINE IS FINED FOR BIRD DEATHS

(Reproduced from International Herald Tribune - 19-6-1976)

UXBRIDGE, England, June 18 (AP).— A court has fined Air India \$18,900 as a result of the deaths of 2,031 parakeets and finches during a flight from Calcutta to London's Heathrow Airport. The airline had been charged with failure to provide food and water for the birds.

Air India attributed the deaths to a 23-hour delay at Kuwait. A spokesman said the airline would appeal yesterday's verdict, adding that since the incident last October Air India has stopped carrying birds as cargo.

Authorities here reported that 1,911 birds arrived dead at the airport yesterday on a British Airways, flight from Calcutta. The parakeets, tiger finches and mynah birds were headed for Italian and West German pet shops.

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# **Over The Last 4 Years Karnataka Has Achieved An Annual Growth Rate of Around 6 %**



Development expenditure has gone up from Rs. 188 crores in 1971-72 to Rs. 424 crores in 1976-77 a rise of 126%.

Annual plan outlay has increased from Rs. 88 crores in 1971-72 to Rs. 227 crores in 1976-77 a rise of 157%.

Per Capita development expenditure has gone up from Rs. 64 in 1971-72 to Rs. 131 in 1976-77.

In the last 4 years employment in the organised sector has gone up from 8.6 lakhs to 10.6 lakhs.

In addition to the State's own budgetary resources, 5 major projects with a total outlay of Rs. 144 crores are being implemented with World Bank assistance.

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*ISSUED BY:*

**THE DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION AND  
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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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BIRDING IN THE LIONTAILED MACAQUE SANCTUARY

Md Ali Reza Khan

Recently the Tamil Nadu Government has declared Kalakkadu Reserved Forest a Sanctuary for the endangered primate Liontailed Macaque (*Macaca silenus*). This Sanctuary is about 40 miles from Tirunelveli town. Buses regularly ply between Kodaiyar Dam and Kallidaikurichi Rly. Station, and the route passes through the Sanctuary.

When I reached Kakkachi - a tea estate close to the Sanctuary - the sky was heavily overcast. This was a little disappointing for I thought I may not be able to see many birds, though I hoped that I would hear them. Before I could finish my tea at the bus stand stall I was delighted to witness a fast disappearing group of Grey Junglefowl. They were about 15 including father, mother and juveniles. The group was crossing a clearing between two sholes.

As I stepped out of the tea shop and set out for Mr. P.V. Kuruvilla's bungalow I found a few House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) hawking insects over an

abandoned golf course. The green grass was literally covered by a layer of brownish grasshoppers, possibly subadult. Such grassy country is absolutely ideal for pipits. However, I saw only a few pairs of, possibly, Malay Pipit running fast over the green mat as I approached them on my way.

After the golf course there was a patch of *Clerodendrum* with some thorny *Acacia*, *Calamus* and *Toddalia*. There I saw a group of six Nilgiri Quaker Babblers (*Alcippe poiocephala*). Two of them were juveniles and could be made out from the way they begged for food. Also two Greyheaded Flycatchers (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) were restlessly sallying out for insects with almost non-stop zit-zit-zitit notes while looking for insects. Suddenly two Travancore Scimitar Babblers (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*) bolted from the ground where they were turning over leaves with a view to getting worms and insect larvae. In no time they vanished into the upper canopy creeping from one branch to another. Later on I saw that this flycatcher and the babbler were common here. A number of Redwhiskered, Redvented, and Yellowbrowed Bulbuls were also here looking for insects.

Mr. Kuruvilla's bungalow supports good ornamental flowers. These are attractive for bird and butterflies. The red flowers of China Rose with long corollas were frequented by Loten's Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia*) and the Little Spiderhunters (*Archnothera longirostra*). They seemed to be fond of china rose nectar. Occasionally the Small Sunbirds (*Cinnyris minima*) visited these flowers. Jungle Mynas (*Aethiopsar fuscus*) were looking out for cut-worms and insects over the lawn.

At noon I went to see a neighbouring shola barely a kilometre from the bungalow. While entering the shola I came across another patch of *Clerodendrum*. (From my later experience I realised that wherever a shola or a primary forest was removed it was soon occupied by this plant or *Lantana* or *Eupatorium*). Here two fully grown Travancore Yellowcheeked Tits (*Machlolophus xanthogenys*) were begging for food from the parents. Their wings were held in a drooping fashion and were being vibrated continuously. This begging instinct was so intense that they overlooked my presence and I got a good chance to shoot them with my tele-zoom. Unlike the Grey Tits this species has a very well-defined backwardly directed crest.

A family party of 7 Blackheaded Babblers flitting amongst *Ochlandra rheedii* - a type of eeta bamboo invited me to the Jungle. Like a search party they were looking for insects and larvae sticking to the side-shoots or settled on leaf surfaces. Suddenly my attention was diverted to a little harsh Chiki-riki-chiki sound. Although it puzzled me I was certain that this sort of sound is always produced by the Black-and-Orange Flycatcher. This call-note was a little different from the ones I was accustomed to hearing in the Palnis, Anamalai, Munnar, Nelliampathies, Nilgiris and Biligiri-rangans where the call is more Chee-ri-rirr - a trisyllable note uttered by both sexes. Within 10 minutes of my search I was able to locate the first pair of this beautifully plumaged flycatcher in the Kalakkadu Reserved Forest. Later on I saw it fairly often. The White-Eyes seemed to be the



most common birds here. I heard a Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myiophonus horsfieldii*) whistling from the neighbourhood of a stream. The Southern Black Bulbuls (*Microscelis psaroides*) were calling from almost every direction of the evergreen forest.

After a good lunch served by Mr. Kuruvilla I joined Mr. Michael who was there to take me to the jungle. We started walking from Kakkachi along the Kodaiyar Dam road with a view to finding the Black-and-Orange Flycatchers and the Liontailed Macaques. Although we could hear and see the former the latter were possibly sleeping or roosting somewhere beyond our reach.

On our 4-mile route we came across a feeding party of birds near Nulumukh bridge. First there appeared about 20 White-Eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosa*). These were followed by four Pied Flycatcher Shrikes (*Hemipus picatus*) and Grey Tits (*Parus major*). Brilliantly coloured scarlet Minivets (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), two scarlet males and two orange females, a number of Yellow-browed Bulbuls (*Iole icterica*), a group of Nilgiri Quaker Babblers and Southern Black Bulbuls were seen. Apart from these in the neighbouring undergrowth Spotted Babblers were scratching the forest floor while Blandford's, or South Travancore Laughing Thrushes (*Trochalopteron jerdoni*) scuttled away with characteristic chucklings.

On our way back, before joining Dr. John F. Oates who is currently studying the Nilgiri Langur in this Sanctuary, we saw Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula badia cuprea*) calling loudly resembling the whoop-whoop call of the Liontailed Macaque. We also saw Emerald Doves and Grackles (*Gracula religiosa*). Before the evening twilight was over Small Green Barbets burst into chorus.

Next morning we went to Sursuppt, 3 miles from Kodaiyar Dam and about 2,000 feet above the Lower Camp of the same Dam. This spot is considered to be a good one for the Nilgiri Tahr - another endangered species. This area is within Virupali Reserved Forest of Nagercoil district. On the way to this Tahr country I saw a few Black-and-Orange Flycatchers and four troops of Nilgiri Langur. Twice I saw giant Earthworms crossing the road. They were of the size of Roughtails (Blind Snakes). Once a Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon flew over us with such speed that it reminded me of the sound of a descending vulture. Its wings were held tight to the body much in the fashion of a stooping Shahin Falcon (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*).

During our two hours search we saw 12 Nilgiri Tahr in three groups. While returning from Sursuppt we followed the steps of the Winch Line. It was a very tiresome climb. After every 15 minutes climb we rested for sometime to regain energy. This gave me the opportunity to watch a pair of Indian Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) catching lizards and eating them standing over a projected rock along the Winch. A pair of Crested Serpent Eagles (*Spilornis cheela*) passed overhead producing their characteristic call-notes. Around the last few steps as we were nearing a shola, I saw a Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) soaring over the upper canopy searching

every tree for its prey.

In the Kodaiyar Dam area, much to my surprise, I saw two Brahminy Kites (*Haliastur indus*). I was even more surprised to see a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) in the environs of Kakkachi. Both these species are birds of marshy areas and dwell in the plains. It is really difficult to explain their presence in this hilly area of about 3,500 feet elevation above mean sea level. When I talked about this to Dr. Dates he told me that due to drought in the neighbouring plains they perhaps moved to the hills.

During my stay at Kakkachi I was greatly helped by Mr. Kuruville who was my host and Dr. Dates who lent me his paid helper Michael. I am grateful to them for all the cooperation they extended.

\* \* \* \* \*

Editorial Note: Readers may be interested in these notes relating to the species which Reza Khan has mentioned in his article.

Nilgiri Quaker Babbler (*Alcippe poioicephala poioicephala*) (Handbook of the Birds of India & Pakistan Vol.7 pp.123)

Status, Distribution and Habit: Common resident. Western Mysore along the Ghats south through Kerala and western Tamil Nadu (Nilgiris and Palnis). Intergrades with *brucei* in southwestern Maharashtra, Goa and the Biligirirangan Hills; from the foothills to 2100m. Affects evergreen and moist-deciduous forest, sholas, ravines, mixed bamboo jungle and canebrakes.

General Habits: Usually seen in parties of six to ten individuals, sometimes up to twenty or more, hopping about among the undergrowth, often ascending to the canopy, flitting from sprig to sprig, clinging upside-down in acrobatic positions, continually calling to each other; often forming the nucleus of the mixed hunting parties of small insectivorous species.

Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) (Indian Hill Birds by Salim Ali pp.83)

Habits: The Grey-headed Flycatcher haunts oak and deodar forest in the Himalayas, and particularly the neighbourhood of well-wooded ravines. In the South Indian hills it affects evergreen sholas, up to the highest, as well as forest of the type intermediate between the evergreen and the deciduous, and is partial to mixed bamboo jungle in foothills and broken country. It is an active, restless little bird for ever making lively swoops after winged insects from a base on some exposed twig, turning and twisting in the air with great dexterity and returning to its perch.

Travancore Scimitar-Babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*) (Indian Hill Birds pp.34)

Habits: This Scimitar-Babbler is confined to densely wooded country, preferably where it is broken and hilly. It is most partial to secondary evergreen or moist deciduous jungle with patches of bamboo, cane and thorn

brakes and *Strobilanthes* undergrowth. The birds go about in pairs or small scattered flocks of four to ten individuals, which rummage on the ground among the mulch, flicking the leaves aside or digging into the moist earth with their scimitar bills in search of insects and grubs.

The Little Spider-Hunter (*Arachnothera longirostra*) (Indian Hill Birds pp131)

Habits: The Little Spider-Hunter is typically a denizen of humid evergreen forest areas. It frequents the low country as well as the hills up to about 5,000 feet elevation. It is usually met with in pairs, and sometimes two or more of these may be seen feeding in company. They keep to the forest, particularly on the edge of glades and clearings, and are inseparable from banana trees whether wild and growing on a hillside, or cultivated in the proximity of outlying forest homesteads, or adjoining the coolie lines on tea, coffee and cardamom plantations. They are uncommonly fond of the nectar of banana blossoms and visit them regularly at all hours of the day, clinging to the purple bracts of the inflorescence upside down, and probing deep into the flower tubes with their specially adapted bills. Their diet consists largely of flower nectar.

Yellow checked Tits (*Machlolophus xanthogenys*)

The author mentions that this species has a very well defined backwardly directed crest. However, the photographs indicate that the crest has a forward, and not a backward, direction. Will any readers comment on this?

Blackheaded Babbler (*Rhopocichla atriceps atriceps*) (Handbook Vo.6 pp.183)

General Habits: Moves about the undergrowth, much in the manner of *Dumetia*, in parties of up to a dozen birds or more, often with other babblers. Seldom ascends more than a metre or two above the ground, but when having ventured too far up, has a habit of dropping perpendicularly like a falling leaf into the thickets below on the slightest alarm.

Black-and-Orange Flycatcher (*Muscicapa nigrorufa*)

The Black-and-Orange Flycatcher is receiving the attention of ornithologists because in evolutionary terms it appears to be a species mid-way between flycatchers and shrikes. This is one of the reasons why Salim Ali has sponsored a project in which Reza Khan is involved. Studies are also being made on the egg-white of this bird to determine its relationship with other species.

White-Eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosa*)

Strangely, Eucalyptus trees are supposed to have no attraction for birds. However, Salim Ali says in his Hill Birds, pp.127: "In the Nilgiris the white brush-like blossoms of the Eucalyptus trees always form an irresistible attraction (for these birds)".

## RAPTORS OF RANGANATHITTU

S.G. Neginhal

Besides its famous breeding heronry, Ranganathittu is interesting for its raptors as well. Hereunder I list some that I have noted.

1) The Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*):

This bright chestnut coloured raptor with its white head, neck and breast is seen throughout the year gliding over the river. Sub-adult birds resemble the Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans*) in general colouration; but their rounded tail unmarks their identity. This kite is silent during the rainy and winter seasons and becomes noisy with its low moaning notes (like mewing of cats) in summer (April and May) when it breeds here.

I have not seen this kite stealing away eggs of the breeding heronry-birds of Ranganathittu as the crows do; but it often takes away in its talons young nestlings when the parents move away from their nests on near approach of visitors. It is also seen that the breeding birds get disturbed and animated when this raptor starts hovering over their nests. (To digress it may be added that the crows also carry away the 2-3 days old chicks in their claws when the parents leave their nests on near approach of the tourists, although this capacity of the crows is disputed.)

2) The Common Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans*):

This large brownish bird is occasionally seen hovering over the sanctuary. This is often confused with the sub-adult Brahminy Kites but its identity is at once revealed by its forked tail.

3) The Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis chusela*):

The crested serpent Eagle is a resident raptor of the Sanctuary. It is a dark brown heavy bird with a nuchal cross-wise crest, kept fully erected when animated. Easily identified in flight also by a white bar across the tail and on the under parts of the rounded wings. Seen either perching on branches of tall trees or circling high up. Becomes too noisy in summer with its shrill screaming "Kek-kek-keee" notes which are repeatedly answered by the other partner nearby. Very bold and allows observation and photography from very near quarters and in turn watches our actions with interest.

I have never seen this raptor preying on the young chicks of the heronry as the Brahminy Kites and crows do.

4) The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*):

This fish-eating hawk is often seen in winter at the sanctuary. It has all white underparts and Coffee-brown upper body with brown-and-white head. The neck is whitish below with a dark brown "necklace" across the upper breast.



It has long and thin wings. During the flight it alternately beats wings and glides. While landing on a tree two sparkling white tips are revealed at the end of its long and flapping dark brown wings. (This was last seen on March 7, 1976).

Once in early winter an Osprey came flying and disappeared downstream of Kaveri and within minutes returned with a big fish in its beak and sat on a boulder to devour it. Two crows came and settled by its side within 3 feet, which was resented by the Osprey and it twice tried to peck at the crows. It had a very light early winter coat - more white on the upper body than brown.

5) The Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*):

This Harrier frequents the flooded paddy fields and marshy areas round about Ranganathittu in winter and is at times seen flying over the sanctuary. It was last seen on March 9, 1976.

6) The Shikra (*Accipiter badius*):

This is the common resident hawk of the sanctuary - lightly built, ashy-grey above, white below with rusty brown bars. It is not commonly seen as it spends most of its time sitting up in the leafy branches of large trees.

Once I was boating in the sanctuary. A swarm of cliff-swallows (*Hirundo flavicollis*) suddenly emerged out from their mud nests and flew in the air. As if with computerised precision a Shikra from a *Terminalia arjuna* tree, from the opposite bank of the river, also swooped into air and carried off its prey before the victim could know what had happened.

## BIRDS IN OUR GARDEN

Zafer Futehally

Last year when we moved here in July we planted several trees specifically for the benefit of birds. These included Bombax, Erythrina, Singapore Cherry and Drumstick. The latter two have grown amazingly in the last 10 months, and are now 12 ft. high, and it is very satisfying to see that some birds have started to come to these trees and feed on the flowers. A pair of Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylanica*) were on the Cherry tree a few minutes ago. They pecked the small white flowers in a lightning manner, and then flitted to another. In the morning light (7.30 a.m.) the colours of these birds - the dark chocolate and green and cream - and their vivacity made me wonder whether any sight could be more beautiful! But of course this is the feeling one gets so often. To attempt to designate anything as the most beautiful scene is pointless. Curiously both the Sunbirds were totally silent. Usually their movements are accompanied by a chip-chip-chip, and a Tsweet-Tity-Tsweet, and this seems to act as encouragement to even more activity.



This year the rains in south Karnataka, where we are, have been very deficient, and in fact yesterday (18-8-1976) we received the first heavy shower in several weeks. Last year at this time there were flocks of 30 and more Blackbullied Finch Larks (*Eremopterix grisea*) running over the land rummaging for insects. At the moment there is just a pair in our garden. A pair of Franklin's Wren Warblers (*Prinia hudsoni*) had built a nest among Zonias, but abandoned it half-way. These Wren Warblers can be identified by their general behaviour, and also by the cream supercilium, red eyes and flesh coloured feet. The other birds in our garden at the moment are House Sparrows, Jungle and House Crows, Red-wattled Lapwings, Black Drongos, Spotted Doves, Common Green Bee-eaters, Common Mynas, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Pied Bush Chats, Red-rumped Swallows, White-breasted Kingfishers, Indian Rollers, Wire-tailed Swallows, Hoopoes, Spotted Munias, White-throated Munias, Bustard Quails, Large Pied Wagtails, Shikras, Spotted Owlets, Pariah Kite and Brahminy Kite.

This list is by no means complete, and some birds like the Red-wattled Lapwing do not reside on our land, but come for an occasional visit. Watching some of these birds feeding in the ploughed area is great fun. Common Green Bee-eaters sit on clods of earth, and take off in pursuit of butterflies and other winged prey either in front or behind them. Their extraordinary eye sight apparently enables them to see in an arc of 360 degrees. Large Pied Wagtails walk industriously back and forth looking intently at the ground, and picking up anything that is available. They sing vociferously during this exercise and the pair is always in vocal communication with each other. They are incapable of pursuing any prey in the air, so that they do not come into any conflict with the Bee-eaters. The flocks of Spotted Munias do not walk back and forth like the Wagtails, they only hop around within the immediate vicinity of the place where they have landed, and then go off somewhere else. Spotted Doves are extremely diligent in their search for food, and they are somewhat of a menace because they eat up the freshly planted seeds unless they are well covered with earth.

The group of Wire-tailed Swallows stay together most of the time except when they are out foraging in the air for insects. Many of them have only a single tail feather, and some have none at all. They are in beautiful plumage otherwise and spend a lot of time preening their feathers keeping them spruce and efficient.

I hear Common Ioras in the neighbouring compound and sometimes they do come to our only Bauhinia tree. I am hoping that when our trees grow a little larger the Ioras' melodious whistle will be heard more frequently.

Most of the birds I have listed live happily in their separate ecological niches (to use a pompous expression). Occasionally there are quarrels. I couldn't understand why the Drongo suddenly attacked the Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla madagaspatensis*) this morning. When the Shikra flies overhead, there is consternation, and the ware-hawk call sends all the little birds quickly under cover.

CORRESPONDENCE

## VISION IN BIRDS

T.V. Jose

Once I happened to see a Koel flying towards a white washed wall and dashing against it. The impact was so powerful that the bird dropped down instantly. I am sure that the incident cannot be an exceptionally rare one, and perhaps some of our readers must have witnessed similar sights. Nor do I feel that other birds are any less defective in their visual acuity.

Koels are arboreal and their chance of hitting against walls is rare indeed. But rock pigeons, common house crows and sparrows are right in the midst of us in very large numbers and not wanting in opportunities to fly at walls or stumble upon glass panes of the innumerable windows in a city like Bombay, mistaking them for open space. Nevertheless I have yet to come across a single case in my life in Bombay. If others have, I wish to know their experience. If they have not, then the absence is significant enough to find out an explanation.

A probable explanation, I may venture, lies in the fact that each bird in its early days of life learns to discriminate through trial and error. This explanation rests on the assumption that these birds (and all others, young or adult) cannot be totally insensitive to the whiteness of the wall or slight opacity of glass panes, but are unable to perceive the object as it is from the sensation they get. It is then a meaningless sensation. But meaning grows into the sensation as they struggle through trial and error, and discriminatory power at perceptory level grows. My experience, contrary to my expectation, does not bear out this explanation. I have never seen any young ones of these birds passing through this stage of trial and error, i.e., hitting at the wall by mistake or struggling to pass through glass panes in vain. They avoid them as if they needed no lesson in it.

This means perhaps that there was such a stage of trial and error in these birds long ago, but they have now been able to pass on such accumulated ability acquired through trial and error for generations to their offspring. This ability to discriminate between the whiteness of walls and the slight opacity of glass panes from open spaces and to perceive them as distinctive objects is added to the existing pool of general information. Then the need to learn this ability afresh in each generation does not arise, but the ability can be improved upon and strengthened further through the experience of the individual birds or impered through persistent disuse.

On the face of it I had difficulty to accept this view. But further consideration reminded me that a chick with no previous experience can distinguish a danger cry from a welter of sounds, a piece of grain from a piece of stone and so on. If this is possible the other must be equally possible. Then I jump to another conclusion: is this not the way in which instincts are formed

in animals? If so, can all the instincts, which we are heir to, be explained in this manner? To me how instincts originate or evolve and build themselves into the mental system of an organism is a mystery.

#### POONA - A HALTING PLACE FOR MIGRATING ROSY PASTORS

Anil Mahabadi and D.B. Bastawde

While observing the roosting behaviour of Indian Mynas and House Crows in Poona (18° 30'N, 73° 53'E) Maharashtra, during March-April of 1974, for the first time we came across very big flocks of migrating rosy pastors roosting communally in the Banian trees alongwith these species.

Thereafter we started counting rosy pastors every month till April 1976, and observed that these birds arrive in the city in small numbers in the first week of October. Till February this number remains more or less the same but in March-April the count increases upto 2000 and in May all of a sudden it declines just to 10 or so. From June-September they were completely absent as they migrate for breeding.

Abdulali, H; (1949) has stated in 'The movements of rosy pastors in India' (JBNHS 46: 704-8) that in autumn and spring the rosy pastors were observed to be moving southeastwards and northwestwards respectively. These observations confirm that during March-April the flocks of rosy pastors, in large numbers congregate and halt in Poona, during their return migratory journey from southeastwards to northwestwards.

#### LAL BANDH AT SANTINIKETAN

Ananta Mitra

At the northern end of Santiniketan alongside the new Reserve Forest, two swamps of considerable size have come into existence. They are called Lal Bandh. In the early morning on 17.4.1976 I had the pleasant experience of watching birds in this locality.

On my approach I was attracted by the wheezing calls of Lesser Whistling Teals (*Dendrocygna javanica*). Along with them and scattered here and there were Cattle Egrets, Pond Herons and Common Sandpipers. A few Brown Shrikes and Black Drongos were perching on the branches of nearby trees.

On the smaller swamp situated to the north, I found a number of Cotton teals (*Mettapus Coromandelianus*) and Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*). Though the border of this jheel is occupied by washermen who were busy with their trade, the birds were quietly moving around without any fear of molestation.

On the northern edge of the bigger swamp there were a large number of Comb Ducks (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*) in several flocks. It was my first encounter with these ducks and was a joyous experience. Most of the birds were females. Males with striking Combs were few and far between. On a rough count I guessed there were about 500 of these birds, and I presume such a big congregation in one place is not very common.

I also discovered a Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), the elegant bird with the glossy shine of black and white.

These three duck and the wagtail are not to be found in the list of "Birds around Santiniketan", compiled in 1955 by the well known Ornithologist Sri P.K. Sen Gupta. Now they can be added to the list of 146 birds. Possibly Lalbandh at that time did not have so much water and vegetation.

At a short distance to the west of the swamps, a deer park has been set up by the Forest Department. A number of Chital (*Axis axis*) and Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*) have been released here for preservation and multiplication. They have more than doubled in course of six years.

People coming here to visit the poet's abode, may enrich their experience by going around the swamps.

#### OPIUM POPPY (*Paver somniferum*) crop and Parrot damage

A.P. Jain

In a visit to Malhargarh (Dist. Mandaur, M.P.) (from 14 to 18.3.1976) it was noticed that the Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) were causing serious loss to the opium poppy crop. Damage was caused by feeding on the unripe poppy capsules either directly on the standing crop or by cutting it and then feeding on it. For this purpose unripe capsules were preferred in general, and those producing latex in particular. It appeared to me that certain birds became addicted to capsule feeding and they tried their best to get it particularly when moving towards their roosts. While feeding on standing crops if the poppy capsules were left partly eaten, in the normal course they dried up and the birds always devoured fresh capsules. Their preference was to feed on that side of the field which was nearer to their temporary roosting places. Opium poppy addicted birds were so unconcerned that they did not respond to our shouting. Unfortunately the birds could not be marked otherwise the opium addiction could have been established for particular birds. The partly eaten capsules neither yielded latex nor the poppy seeds. And so on an average, the damage to this crop ranged from 7 to 10 per cent. The loss caused by these birds is worth recording particularly because the plants and their products are of export and medicinal importance. These birds indulge in communal roosting, and they prefer the Banyan tree (*Ficus religiosa*), and their next choice is the Mango tree (*Mangifera indica*) and the Babool (*Acacia nilotica*). The maximum flock-size consisted of more than two hundred birds and on a single Banyan tree over two thousand birds had roosted.



CROWS CACHE

M.S. Ramamoorthi

Regarding Mr. Debashis Ray's query about the "Crows Cache" in the Newsletter issue of June 1976, I want to state the following:

On various occasions I have seen jungle crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) hiding food articles such as a lump of cooked rice, a piece of coconut kernel, a bit of oilcake and once a fruit of the rain tree in the palm leaf thatched roofs or in paddy straw heaps.

At about 7.00 a.m. on the 3rd of August 1976, I heard the cawing of a crow and found the bird (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) on the tiled roof of a nearby shed. Because it had something white in its beak I started watching.

The white object looked like a lump of cooked rice, and the bird seemed to be searching for a suitable cache (secret storing place for provisions). Then it placed the stuff in a crevice between two rows of tiles and carefully hid it with some small twigs and fallen leaves found on the roof itself.

As if satisfied with its action it cawed six times, took a few jaunty steps to reach the top of the roof and flew away to a nearby tree.

I waited but could not find the crow coming back to fetch its cache and I think the stuff is still there up to this day 6-8-1976. In the past also, I have never been able to find a crow coming back to recover the stuff it has once hidden.

I have never seen a House Crow engaged in such an activity.

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A few more lines about the Crow.

Like most parts of our country our villages are infested by huge populations of crows. Jungle crows are more numerous than the house crows.

There is a popular belief that the crow is a bird devoid of jealousy. There is a line in an old Tamil poem which means "The crow without jealousy caws to share its meal with its kinsfolk". But I have doubted the truth of that belief from the days of my childhood.

There is a custom among the Hindus, especially brahmins, to throw a handful of cooked rice to the crows before the family sits for the midday meal. Usually the waiting crows assemble to share the offering. Though some crow may caw by instinct, only the audacious ones eat the food pecking at any other crow that may try to have a share.

This and the cache keeping habit clearly show that the crow is not too concerned about the fate of its companions.



## THE DECLINE OF RAPTORS

Asad Akhter

This is with reference to K.S. Lavkumar's "The Decline of Raptors", Vol. XVI No.4, April '76.

During a recent visit to Bihar, I was struck by the almost total absence of Birds of Prey. Enquiries from my uncle revealed that these birds were quite common till the late sixties, but the increased use of insecticides played havoc with their numbers, with the result that they have been almost totally wiped out. This has resulted in an ecological imbalance, which is evident from the frequent outbreaks of insect-epidemics, and since a biological control is lacking, these epidemics acquire an explosive form.

While a few years back, commuting on foot with eatables in hand was a sure invitation to these birds, nowadays even long distances can be covered without any response. In fact the use of insecticides has become so indiscriminate that vegetables bought in the bazaar are sure to give one nasty gastric trouble.

It's very disheartening to note the sad decline of even our so called common birds.

## INDIAN ROLLERS, BLACK DRONGOS, ETC. FEEDING AT NIGHT

Sureshwar Gupta, 153 DE, Sir Syed Street, Khagaul (Patna 801105) points out in a letter that Indian Rollers, Black Drongos and other birds feed late into the night. He has observed Indian Rollers around street lamps in Patna hawking insects as late as 10.00 p.m. outside the Danapur station. Black Drongos have also been noticed as late as 9.00 p.m.

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Volume XVI No.11

November 1976

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FROM SALIM ALI'S NOTEBOOK (II) - Ed.

Trip III to Elephanta - 1 March 1942

Ichitrea paradisi - Solo. Chestnut minus ribbons

Corvus macrorhynchus - the first pair

Buteo rufinus - A pair circling up: Pale (whitish) patches under wing,  
near tip, very conspicuous.

Oriolus xanthornus - solo.

Artamus fuscus - rare

Micropus affinis - 3 individuals. Where have they come from? Where do  
they live? Not seen on previous trips

Bombax malabaricum common and now mostly flowering.

Erythrina indica scarce and confined to coastline.

Erythrina suberosa on hillsides and up to top.

Pastor roseus - absent.

Phylloscopus trochiloides - only 1 solo

Oenanthe deserti - still only the 2 in the same patch

Turdoides somervillei completely absent, also other babblers.

Psittacula absent

Columba livia - only 1 flying over high.

Thereiceryx absent

Centropus "

Eudynamis "

Dendrocitta "

Hirundo daurica absent



Dissemurus absent though country suitable for it.

Galerida malabarica strutting round and round (courtship) with tail cocked and half open semi-drooping wings. Local resident affirms that Peafowl still present on the island, also pig. Squirrels absent.

#### Trip IV - 15 March 1942

Brachypternus bengalensis - solo on palmyra in coastal belt

Monticola solitaria - 2

Motacilla feldegg melanogriseus, M. flava beema, M. citreola

M. a. dukhunensis now all in perfect breeding plumage.

Astur badius - at least 5

Falco tinnunculus - solo

Alseonax latirostris - solo

Pastor roseus - now on Bombax in full bloom continuous

Vultures observed flying in broad continuous band from mainland on E side of island (Bhayndar &c) about 12-1 noon.

Presumably conveying food for young.

Larus - getting into summer plumage. 'Mirrors' now very prominent on wing tips of brunicephalus which is also noticeably larger in size.

Acridotheres tristis - a gathering of 30 (counted) to chivy snake (?) near the pier, assisted by crows and Passer.

Local resident affirms that House Crows roost and nest on island. Confirm.

Woodfordia fruticosa and calycopteris floribunda bushes now in full bloom. Former uncommon and locally patchy. Only on steep cuttings and banks.

#### INCREASE IN BIRD POPULATION IN A SIX HECTARE PLOT IN BANGALORE ON PLANTING A GARDEN

Joseph George

Bangalore is famed as the garden city of India. Yet, for a birdwatcher this garden city proves to be an unexpected disappointment. The city and its suburbs are poor in bird life. The density of bird population is low and even the more common species like crows, doves, mynas and the house sparrow are scarce. Bird voices are seldom heard.

Exact reasons for this poverty of bird life are not known, but the relatively dry environment, and the highly eroded and leached soil which has no grass cover are probably the main factors inhibiting the growth of bird population. However, birds can be attracted to settle down and multiply in numbers in this city by developing gardens and planting suitable shrubs and trees capable of providing food and habitat for birds. This transformation was observed in a six hectare plot in an industrial suburb of Bangalore as briefly described in this note.

### Campus without garden

In 1970 the plot, on which a national institution is situated, had no gardens. There was hardly any shade-giving tree. Silver oak (Grevillea robusta) had been planted an year earlier in a small area and a much larger area had been under Eucalyptus for 3 years. All round the buildings of the Institute soil erosion was rampant. Four Acacia auriculiformes trees planted with the Eucalyptus were doing well. But a few Spathodeas planted at the same time were stunted in growth because of the absence of soil and rapid run off of rain water. A few small Acacias, Albizias, a Ficus, a few other bushy trees and thorny scrub completed the vegetation on the campus which was rich in lizards and snakes but poor in birds. Hardly ten species of birds were seen on the campus for about an year. Among them the blackwinged kite, the singing bushlark and the ashy crowned finch-lark were particularly noticeable.

The planting of a garden was begun in the middle of 1970. Retaining walls were built in order to prevent soil erosion. Construction of boundary walls and fencing prevented intrusion of cattle. The land was terraced and lawns were planted around the Institute buildings.

### Development of the garden

A mixed shrubbery, three rows deep, was planted along the boundary wall in front of the building. Flowering and foliage trees and shrubs were planted in selected locations. Bougainvillaeas were planted against a slope in the garden. A dense bamboo grove was planted in addition to bamboos at scattered places. Climbers were planted against trees and walls. A small lotus pond was developed with pink and white lotus, water-lilies, reeds, rushes and other aquatic plants. The log pond of the Institute constructed subsequently is an added attraction for water-loving birds. A rockery was set up and a variety of cacti, agaves and other plants were introduced. A garden nursery was established together with a large variety of potted plants. When the laying out and planting of the garden was completed in about three years time the garden had about 400 species of flowering and foliage plants including potted plants.

Valuable guidance in planting the garden was given by the Mysore Horticultural Society and in particular Mr. M.T.R. Cruz, Assistant Director of Horticulture (Landscape), Lalbagh, Bangalore. Otherwise the whole operation was an amateur's job, assisted by several books on garden plants and trees.

### Changes in fauna

The planting of the garden brought about a considerable change in the fauna of the area. Several cobras **had** unfortunately to be killed as they came into the buildings from their disturbed environment. On the other hand the green tree snake and water snake came to the area and strict instructions have been issued that they should not be harassed.

The lizards seem to have adjusted to the changes. There has been an explosive increase in the rodent population. Rats and bandicoots are being kept in check, but no action has so far been taken against three striped palm squirrels. They misappropriate nest boxes meant for birds and steal thread used for tying plants to stakes for lining their nests. When Doxantha unguiscata is in bloom on the auditorium walls the squirrels nesting among the vines systematically destroy the flowers while seeking honey. It may be mentioned at this point that honey bees are other occupants of nest boxes. Lizards take up vantage points on the lid of the boxes occupied by bees and prey upon them sometimes. The garden abounds in butterflies but caterpillars are often troublesome.

As the landscape around the Institute began changing, the number of birds visiting the garden increased over six fold, several of them nesting here. It was a thrilling experience when a pair of purple-rumped sunbirds appeared in the garden in June 1972. The first pair of redvented bulbuls arrived in May 1973. A surprising visitor was the barn owl which was seen twice; once inside a plywood house under construction and another time inside a staff van. Better roosting places are being provided for the owl. A coucal visited the garden in August 1974. It is hoped that the bird will nest in the bamboo thicket some day.

A male black redstart during its winter visits roosts in a recess in the porch of the plywood house. In October 1974 a forest wagtail spent a day in the garden presumably on its journey to the West Coast. A quincunx of Arythrinus attract black headed and jungle mynas when in flower. Several golden orioles come to the flowering silver oaks. Flower-peckers, both Tickell's and thick billed, are inseparable from Muntingia calaburra (Chinese cherry) trees. Green parakeets are attracted by the seeds of Spathodea companionata. Occasionally a Blyth's reed warbler or ashy wren-warbler would enter the lounge of the Institute attracted by potted plants in planters. One ashy wren-warbler, instead of going out by the large front door through which it had entered the lounge, flew to the rear to reach a dense group of foliage plants arranged there. Unfortunately the bird hit the large glazed shutters in the way and fell to the floor unconscious. It was transferred to a safe place in the garden where it revived after some time and flew away.

Bougainvilleas trained on to a small Acacia tree provided shelter for the first pair of spotted doves nesting in the garden. Later a pair of little brown doves also started nesting in the area.

A flock of whiteheaded babblers were among the early arrivals who have settled down in the garden. A pair nested on a Polyalthia pendula hardly 1.5 m high. When I approached the tree to look at the abandoned nest, a pair of fruit bats flew out. Large pied wagtails sing from the Institute buildings' roof and are always seen near the lo<sup>g</sup> pond. They have nested in locations inside man-made structures. A pair of common mynas nest on a travelling crane above the lo<sup>g</sup> pond and are not inconvenienced by the movement of the crane. Another pair comes to nest inside a workshop through a broken pane of a skylight. A pair of spotted owlets have followed suit. Spotted and white-

throated munias nest at several places in the garden. Nest boxes provided to encourage hole nesting birds have rarely been available to them as mentioned earlier.

Tailor birds started nesting in the garden by the time broad leaved plants such as Erythropsis colorata and Sterculia guttata were hardly 30 cm high. Purple and purplerumped sunbirds seem to prefer thorny plants to nest on. Their nests have been seen on Acacia arabica, A. leucophloea, A. suma, Caesalpinia sepiaria (Mysore thorn) and Bambusa arundinacea (thorny bamboo). One female sunbird obtained soft lining material for her nest from a squirrel's nest among Doxantha vines. A kool was fostered by house crows in 1974.

The magpie robin which usually prefers well developed gardens and parklands for its habitat visited the Institute garden last winter. A visit by a small green barbet this summer also confirms the fact that the garden is now developed to an extent where many species of birds can find suitable habitats. The call of the barbet is now heard in the garden. It has been a most fascinating and absorbing experience to watch the remarkable growth in the number and variety of birds inhabiting or visiting the campus, as a result of the development of its garden and vegetation.

Visits by paradise flycatchers occasion much curiosity and comment because, it may be mentioned, that some of the employees of the Institute who were earlier completely unaware of their surroundings are now interested in the plant and animal life around them. In this context the statement that no people may fairly claim a country as their own unless they have an easy familiarity with its fauna and flora is worth repetition.

#### THE WHISTLING THRUSH - THE HARBINGER OF THE MONSOON

Br. A. Navarro

The erratic monsoon this season enthused me into going after the Whistling Thrush to shoot his music on tape and record the tunes for the benefit of those unable to brave the monsoons in the jungle and to hear the bird in its habitat. Sunday after Sunday I went up to Khandala, wandering through the forest in quest of my ideal. Recording the songs of the Whistling Thrush is a rather complex task since this bird sings at its best only when it rains; to all appearances the Thrush is least pleased with light showers; it prefers a heavy downpour for a display. On the other hand the main obstacle in the circumstances required for the best performance of the bird is that one cannot go through the forest with the nature of equipment needed for the purpose of recording the songs; my last recourse was to take refuge in some of the vacant villas bordering the forest and yet not too near the main arterial highway, hoping against hope that there would be some nest of the Whistling Thrush nearby. If a nest is spotted, one can be sure the bird will not be far away.



As I was musing on these thoughts, my memory suddenly flashed years back to tell me that at St. Mary's Villa, along the verandah of one of the buildings nearer the ravine, for several years now the Whistling Thrush had been building its nest in one of the rafters. On making enquiries with the caretaker about the Kala Gogya (the local name for the Whistling Thrush) and its breeding habits, I was informed that the bird had already built its nest. Further inquiries revealed that the Whistling Thrush had built its nest soon after the recent cyclone in early June.

But then due to the erratic monsoon following the cyclone, during the intervals of dry weather, the thrushes were neglecting the nests and only during the heavy rains would they resume their nestling activities.

My penultimate visit was on the 16th of August, the nest had not yet been used. From a hideout I ~~watched~~ from 6.00 a.m. until late in the evening and the pair never visited the nest. I could see both of them all day long, the male occasionally chasing the female from tree to tree, as if they were playing a game of hide-and-seek; but no more than that play took place. As early at 6.15 in the morning, the male began its calls, none lasting more than fifty seconds! Through the rest of the day I could hear the sporadic whistling calls. From about 10.45 to 11.30 a.m. the male thrush made two long whistling songs lasting from two to two and a half minutes. I recorded the second song. At 12.00 noon, a short spell of rain with heavy mist suddenly covered the area: at that moment the thrushes left the forest and came to the open entrance of the building, hopping along the verandah, uttering their short whistling calls. As the strong winds swept away the mist, with the same swiftness the thrushes left and flew back into the forest.

On my last observation on the 29th of August I found the thrushes were still there, but the nest was, as on my earlier observations, unattended.

From the 26th to the 29th August I spent three days at St. Xavier's Villa, Khandala, with some of my friends. The Whistling Thrushes breed also in the vicinity of this villa, but not with the same regularity as at St. Mary's Villa. In this case the nest was always placed in a small window; the caretaker gave me to understand that this year the Kala Gogya had not been seen as frequently as in former years; he had heard their calls occasionally. The three days of my stay at the villa were unfruitful till on the last day a whistling thrush uttered a few long notes and flew back into the forest.

I have been speaking of the erratic monsoon. I should like here to specify what I mean by erratic monsoon. Though the total rainfall at Khandala may be normal, yet this year there has been a slight difference in that there have been a series of short spells of heavy rainfall with rather long-lasting spells of very scanty rain; the steady rainfall typical of the Khandala region has been absent this year.

The Whistling Thrush, in relation to its breeding habits, has a preference for an environment that contains four different elements; the main element



would be "forest", but a forest atmosphere that mingles with gorges, rocks, cliffs, tunnels and caves with torrents, streams and nullahs, abundant rain, fog and mist; this last feature is so essential to the breeding habit of the thrush that it makes me doubt whether it would breed successfully in case of severe drought or a total failure of the monsoon.

The Khandala region indeed is favoured with all these elements. The gorges can be seen on the left side of the ravine along the railway line towards Pune, the rocks and the precipices of the Duke's Nose ravine being quite prominent. Rain fog and mist are typical features of the Khandala Ghat during the monsoon.

The long years of my association with the Khandala region has taught me that the Whistling Thrushes have a tendency to build their nests always in the same spots within tunnels, and caves, behind waterfalls and in vacant abandoned villas near the forest. The spots selected are never too dark and not deep into the tunnels and caves, but well-protected from bright light. During the dry season I have been able to spot many nests which during the monsoon were well concealed by the action of the falling waters.

The Whistling Thrush rarely can be seen out of the forest during the dry season. It is only during the premonsoon showers when rain, fog and mist cover the whole area that the thrush comes out of the forest and makes its appearance in the open, entering gardens and compounds, uttering its jolly whistling tunes. We may say that they are the heralds of the coming monsoon.

#### BOOK REVIEW

ORNITHOLOGY by Erwin Stresemann. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1975. pp.xii + 432. \$ 20.00

Dr. Erwin Stresemann, who died in 1972 at the age of 83, was, according to Ernst Mayr, "perhaps the outstanding ornithologists of his era." To Indian birdwatchers and ornithologists he is something more, because it was from him that Dr. Salim Ali learnt the technical aspects of ornithology. Stresemann is, therefore, their acharya's guru.

In 1951 Dr. Stresemann published a book in German on the development of ornithology from "Aristotle to the Present". The aim of the book, its contents, and the circumstances in which it was written remind one of Milton and his "Paradise Lost". The book has an epic sweep, a story dealing with giants among men, a narrative full of conflicts in which events were shaped as much by fate as by human character and skill. Although its aim is to trace man's efforts to classify and study birds, it covers a much wider area, chronicles man's endeavours to understand Nature, and has much to tell us about the history of ideas.

The book is so full of the elements of drama that it may well be regarded as divided into three Acts, followed by an Epilogue. The narrative is not

strictly chronological. Like a Conrad novel, it takes us forwards and backwards in time. The story is too long and complex to be told in brief, but its main outline consists of a series of conflicts, the central one being that between Natural Philosophy and Natural Science. For many centuries from the time of Aristotle, the notion that all Nature was created by God at one stroke prevented even the most scientific minds from thinking in terms of evolution. During the Middle Ages, in particular, "all knowledge was subsumed under Theology, Queen of the Sciences. History reflected the purpose of God, Science demonstrated His creative plan, and the world of man and nature formed a whole, dominated by its Final Cause." (M.C. Bradbrook: 1951. "Shakespeare & Elizabethan Poetry") In fact, till the views of Darwin won wide acceptance, teleology and biology were ever at war. The other conflicts can be variously described as that between the Linnacians and Lamarckians, between the supporters of binomials and those of trinomials and so on. It would be sheer impudence on the part of one who first saw the name of Dobzhansky in this book to attempt even a summary of the more technical sections, as for instance chapter 15, "The Effect of the Theory of Mutation".

To the ordinary birdwatcher or, for that matter, even the ordinary man-watcher, of much greater appeal will be the numerous potted biographies which constantly interrupt, without seriously disrupting, the main narrative. As the headings of various chapters suggest, Stresemann was as much interested in the personalities of the men who fought for or against various ideas as in the ideas themselves. There were, moreover, many intrepid adventures whose exploits and experiences the author found quite absorbing. Many a bird-watcher, while puzzling over scientific names, must have wondered who Gmelin, or Temminck, or Sonnerat was. Stresemann tells us not only who those men were, but what sort of men they were. Most of these brief life-sketches are fascinating because they are brilliant portraits limned by one who was not afraid of including the warts and scars on the faces of his subjects. For example, while giving Temminck full credit for his services to the Rijksmuseum in Leiden, Stresemann does not gloss over the fact that Temminck's dog-in-the-manger policy greatly retarded the progress of ornithology. While commending Bowdler Sharpe's energy, industry and skill, Stresemann adds, "Certainly it was not simply his daemon that drove him to pile burden upon burden; it was also the anxiety about providing for the ten lively daughters with whom he had been blessed after his marriage at the age of 19." Bowdler Sharpe's temper and tantrums are also amusingly dealt with.

Among the numerous episodes of "human interest" narrated, one of the most memorable is that of Brehm, the 'Bird Parson', concluding a Sunday service in church and then ecstatically embracing the adolescent Hermann Schlegel who had brought into the church a Warbler he had just shot in order to prove that what the Parson had believed to be an immature Icterine Warbler was in fact a Marsh Warbler.

In the section dealing with exotic ornithology, most of the biographies end in tragedy. To take a few examples from the chapter "The Natural History Commission of the Dutch East Indies", Dr. Heinrich Kuhl died at 24, Heinrich

Boie at 33, Duvacel at 32 (at Madras), E.A. Forster at 32, almost all of them of diseases contracted when out in the field! But what was worse was that much of their work was wasted. Says Stresemann about Temminck's selfishness and inefficiency, "A comparison of what the young scientists achieved on the spot with Temminck's published yield tempts one to ask whether Kuhl, van Hasselt, Boie and Macklot, Horner and Forster did not die in vain for their idol, science."

Although European ornithology appears to have been dominated by German scientists, two at least of the longer biographies are of Frenchmen: Francois Levaillant and Charles Lucien Bonaparte. I found the account of Levaillant more interesting. This man was a daring explorer, an accomplished author and an expert on African birds. Unfortunately, he was also inordinately vain. To gain greater kudos, he described purely imaginary journeys and fictitious adventures. He also created many 'new species' by skilfully gluing together the feathers of different species and added to his already imposing collections the skins of birds which did not occur in the regions explored by him! His lavishly illustrated bird books and the sale of his specimens made him quite affluent and enabled him to live like a prince. Suddenly, however, the craze for luxurious bird books ended, and Levaillant was reduced to abject poverty and forced to take up residence in an attic up many flights of stairs. It was characteristic of him that he should have made "the bitter joke that the longer he lived, the higher he rose in the world".

Levaillant may have lacked integrity, but he was no thief. Plagiarism on a large scale appears to have been practised by some other "authorities". One of them was Valentijn who, in 1726, published the encyclopaedic volume, "The East Indies, Old and New". Almost everything of value that he had to say about birds was lifted from the unpublished manuscript of an older contemporary, G.E. Rumpf. But the jay did not know how to wear his borrowed plumes. In his account of the Cassowary occurs the sentence, "I tried its flesh in 1668 and found the fat white and agreeable in taste." But, in 1668, Valentijn was only two years old. This sentence had been in one of the many passages he had pilfered from Rumpf's manuscript. The moral is obvious.

The book, as Stresemann left it in 1951, did not contain many footnotes or a bibliography. As Ernst Mayr explains in the Foreword (which is itself the best and most succinct review imaginable), these deficiencies were made good by G.W. Cottrell. The English version (a "superb translation" according to Ernst Mayr) was prepared by Hans. J. and C. Epstein.

The interest and value of the original book are considerably enhanced by the 33-page Epilogue, "Materials for a History of American Ornithology" written by Ernst Mayr. In this occurs a most interesting incident. Let Mayr himself tell the story: "(F.M. Chapman) was a most understanding colleague, full of wisdom and friendliness. When, as a young man recently arrived from Germany, I reported to him and asked to be assigned a definite task, he said: 'We

engaged you as a specialist in South Sea birds, and I leave it entirely to your judgement what you would like to take up first. Come back with your manuscript after it is completed.' This certainly represented freedom of research in the best sense of the word. To one used to the more authoritarian customs of German science, this was an unforgettable experience."

Although printed at the Harvard University Press, the text is not free from misprints. If only to prove that I have read it from end to end, let me point out some of these errors:

- p.238 - 'similarityas' for 'similarity as'.
- " - the name Reichenbach is left incomplete.
- p.251 - 'roles' for 'rules'.
- p.292 - 'if' for 'it'.

One wonders also why the lines are not filled up to the right hand margin especially when there are numerous examples of long words being split into two when they come at the end of a line.

The price of the book, coupled with the fact that the ordinary bird-watcher need not learn the intricate history of systematics, makes it unnecessary for most of us to consider buying a copy. But, if you can manage to borrow a copy, do not miss a chance of reading it.

K.K. Neelakantan

#### REPRODUCTION

(From JS, Calcutta - Sept. 25 - October 8, 1976)

#### How to hatch an Eagle

"Last year, the first of the Asian Golden Eagles to be hatched in Britain, created wildlife news. This is part of a scheme to release at least 30 of these birds into the Scottish highlands each year. The number of Scottish eagles has been dwindling drastically. This year, the second Asian Golden Eagle to be hatched in Britain nearly copped it. It was born in an incubator and taken to be kept under a 150-Watt lamp - when it was noticed by the people at the Wildlife Breeding Centre, Hertfordshire, that they only had a 175-Watt lamp, which would have fried the golden eagle to a crisp brown. WBC, which has bred buzzards, sparrow-hawks, five eagle-owls, and 103 weasels, had a prominent electronics firm create a number of 150-Watt lamps - a wildlife emergency request. There's one Asian Golden Eagle more in the Scottish highlands today as a result".



CORRESPONDENCE

## STUDIES IN THE EASTERN GHATS

Trevor Price

I am a graduate student from Cambridge, England, in India for a year to study the bird life of the Eastern Ghats on a Leverhulme Overseas Studentship. I am based at Lemmasinghi, 80 miles west of Vishakapatnam which is situated on the edge of the escarpment just over 800 metres high. The vegetation is tropical moist deciduous, represented by scrub and secondary growth in the valley and climax woodland on the hill slopes.

The main aim of the study is to see how the winter visitors and passage migrants utilise the area, and affect the resident birds, and to follow the annual cycle of the residents. The study involves trapping (twice a week in a quarter square mile of secondary growth and once below the woodland canopy), observation and sampling the birds' food availability (particularly the insects).

The Eastern Ghats is one of the lesser known areas of India birdwise. Whistler (JBNHS Vol. 35 p. 505 and salseq) visited on the Verney Scientific expeditions and further notes were added by Humayun Abdulali (JBNHS Vol. 45 pp. 333-347). There have been two ringing camps here during the springs of 1971 and 1972, organised by the Bombay Natural History Society. During the second I became familiar with the area.

The first migrant (*Motacilla caspica* - the grey wagtail) arrived before me (August 23rd) and by mid September a roost of c. 550 birds had built up in a large tree by the village. The commonest bird in the area at the moment (the beginning of October) is the greenish warbler (*Phylloscopus trachiloides*). The first to arrive from its Baltistan breeding grounds was noted on 28th August. Numbers have increased steadily since but only now have they become sufficiently crowded for territorial clashes to occur.

Other birds visiting during the month may well be passage migrants - time will tell. Certainly the palm swifts (*Cypsiurus parvus*) were. At least, 3000 passed northwards along the valley on August 30 between eight and nine a.m. and smaller numbers (with a slight evening return passage) were noted for the next week. They are now completely absent. Early in the month the orange headed ground thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) was trapped, later the small cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*), brown shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), Forest Wagtail (*Motacilla indica*), grey drongo (*Dicrurus leucophalus*) and large billed warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*).

The other 77 species observed or trapped are presumably resident. Practically everyone examined in the land has been in moult. Notable exceptions are the two Wren Warblers - the Ashy Wren Warbler (*Prinia socialis*) represented by four pairs in the quarter square mile has fledged young during the month while the one pair of (*Prinia sylvanica*) the jungle wren warbler hatched one egg from an abnormally small clutch of two on September 30th. These are striking comparisons to be made with birdlife of my homeland. These birds moult more



rapidly, are much less active and infrequently caught. During September in a similar area one may expect to catch thirty species of which all except the rare vagrant will be represented by more than 10 individuals. During September here I trapped 55 species of which only eleven had individual numbers in double figures and 20 were represented by just a single bird. One problem will be separating vagrants from low density regularly occurring species!

There are some striking contrasts, too, to be made with the lowlands only two horizontal miles away. Here, there are no house crows, mynas or rose ringed parakeets (replaced in smaller numbers by the blossom headed parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)). For example, I should like to conclude by extending the 'at home' invitation. I would be delighted if any birder were to join me for a few days.

Address: Trevor Price, Forest Rest House, Lammasinghi,  
Via Narsipatnam, Vishakapatnam Dist., A.P.

#### OLFACTION IN BIRDS

B.A. Palkhiwalla

After reading on the above subject in this month's (October 1976) Newsletter I am quoting below extracts from an article I read in the International Wildlife Magazine July/Aug. 1976 issue. The article is titled "Scavenger's way" and is written by Emily and Per ole D'Aulaire, who are freelance journalists.

"Vultures, like most birds, seemed blind to even the most powerful of odours - perhaps just as well for them. But as often happens **with these birds**, there is an exception to the rule. For many years, unknown to ornithologists, gas company field engineers in Southern California have used turkey vultures in their work, watching for the birds to circle over leaks in the buried pipes, apparently attracted to ethyl mercaptan, a foul smelling compound added as a "marker" to help humans notice escaping natural gas which is otherwise odourless.

"When Kenneth Stager of the Los Angeles County Museum, a student of avian olfaction, heard about the gas company's 'Scouts', he included the chemical in a series of field tests in an attempt to settle the question once and for all. His conclusion published in 1964, found that turkey vultures, and to a lesser extent the South American King Vulture do indeed locate carrion by smell - something no other vulture can do."

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After reading on the above subject in this month's (October 1976) Newsletter I am quoting below extracts from an article I read in the International Wildlife Magazine July/Aug. 1976 issue. The article is titled "Scavenger's way" and is written by Emily and Per ola D'Aulaire, who are freelance journalists.

"Vultures, like most birds, seemed blind to even the most powerful of odours - perhaps just as well for them. But as often happens **with these birds**, there is an exception to the rule. For many years, unknown to ornithologists, gas company field engineers in Southern California have used turkey vultures in their work, watching for the birds to circle over leaks in the buried pipes, apparently attracted to ethyl mercaptan, a foul smelling compound added as a "marker" to help humans notice escaping natural gas which is otherwise odourless.

"When Kenneth Stager of the Los Angeles County Museum, a student of avian olfaction, heard about the gas company's 'Scouts', he included the chemical in a series of field tests in an attempt to settle the question once and for all. His conclusion published in 1964, found that turkey vultures, and to a lesser extent the South American King Vulture do indeed locate carrion by smell - something no other vulture can do."

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*Cover Picture :* GREYLAG GEESE, BHARATPUR, Photo by E. Hanumantha Rao



# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XVI NO. 12 DECEMBER 1976



NEWSLETTER FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

Volume XVI No.12

December 1976

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NEWSLETTER 1976

The time has come for reviewing the activities of the past year. We had hoped that we would attain a target of 500 subscribers, but we have fallen considerably short of this figure. The total number is just over 300, and the number of foreign subscribers is 19.

With regard to the economics, Shri S.V. Nilkanta sent us Rs.1000 from the old accumulated balance of the Newsletter in Bombay, and the amount realised from subscriptions, donations and miscellaneous receipts in the current year was Rs.3,720. From advertisements, a new source of income, we received Rs.1,500. On balance, we are likely to end the year with a deficit of Rs.500/-. We do hope that in 1977 the number of subscribers will go up, and the deficit will be wiped out. We would particularly like to thank our donors and advertisers for their assistance.

We would like to express our gratitude to Mr. E. Hanumantha Rao for donating his beautiful photograph for the Newsletter covers, and to Prof. M.D. Gadgil of the Indian Institute of Science for arranging for the cyclostyling, and to the several others who continue to encourage this effort.

We would like to thank J.S. Serrao for collecting subscriptions from various Bombay members, and hope that his example can be followed by readers in other regions. We will try and produce an index of the articles of 1976 early in the new year.

Editor.

## FROM SALIM ALI'S NOTEBOOK (III) - Ed.

Trip V to Elephanta - 28/29 March 1942

Cinneryia asiatica - Nest in Vitex bush overhanging dry nullah at edge of paddy cultivation. Female collecting papery bark from Jatropha stems. Nest nearly complete. No eggs. Male occasionally accompanies female and clings and peeps into nest hole by himself, but does not help in building.

Ploceus philippinus - first 3 on island. Gleaning paddy. In off plumage.

Lanius schach - solo

Eudynamis scolopacea - several heard early A.M.

Strix ocellata - heard ca. 4.30 A.M.

Riparia cancolor - several old disused nests on ceiling of cave verandah.

Hirundo rustica - distinctly scarcer

Cinneryia asiatica - eating nectar from Sterculia colorata flowers.

A vulture on nest in Bombax very like G. indicus. Young in nest as dark as Pseudogyps, rather greyer black.

Gymnorhis xanthocollis - apparently on increase. Eating Sterculia colorata nectar. Forehead yellow with pollen.

Aethopyga vigorsii - First meeting. Eating nectar from S. colorata flowers. Male, solo.

Corvus splendens - A few certainly roost on island, in Banyan near cave curator's bungalow.

Halcyon emyrensis - now singing.

Dicrurus macrocercus - duets have commenced

Aegithina tiphia ♀

Copsychus saularis ♀ Now in display and song

Ploceus philippinus - Another date palm on N side of island (coast) near "King's Way" with ca. 10 old Baya nests facing E. Two further nests in Ber in centre of island. This is practically the lot.

Streptopelia chinensis - F. com. Now in courtship "arc" flights.

Upupa epops - 2 solos

Leucocerca pectoralis - Very partial to mangroves - Sonneratia acida on N & W sides.

Monticola cinclorhynchos - Solo (H.A.!)

Muscicapula tickelliae - In song, early A.M.

Uroloncha striata - Building in clump of Viscum on Grewia ca. 25 ft. up.

Glottis nebularia - 2

Pastor roseus - all gone

Artemus fuscus - chiefly about Borassus palms on E. side.

Motacilla flava beema (blue-headed) - 3 or 4; 1 in perfect summer plumage.

Streptopelia chinensis - ca. 25 (in 2 lots) gleaning paddy.

Haliaeetus leucogaster - a pair in same spot as on Trip I

Demigretta asha - 1 white: 1 intermediate.

Monticola solitaria - 2

Forest on island heavily parasitised everywhere by Loranthus & Viscum. The latter almost inseparable from Grewia. Sterculia colorata plentiful. Trees now in bloom. Flowers probed into by Gymnoris, Otocompsa emaris, Acridotheres and Sunbirds.

All pongamia glabra now in fresh leaf. Erythrina indica mostly (or only) along edge of island just above the highest water mark. Common only on North side (opposite Trombay and Pir Pao) and on side (opposite Uran). Water-borne seed? In monsoon? On hillsides, right up to top, chiefly Erythrina stricta (or/and suberosa) Bombax flowers mostly over and all Pastors gone.

## THE WINTER VISITORS TO THE NILGIRIS

Priya Davider

My early memories and experience of migrant birds had little to do with observation or scientific investigation, rather of sitting huddled behind lake bunds on chilly winter evenings, while flight after flight of water birds winged overhead. There were pochards, shovellers, pintails, and teals - it was the evening flight. Flocks came in a rush of air, silhouetted against the evening sky, and disappeared into the darkness behind. Shotguns went off with a bang. A double barrellled shotgun would be thrust in my hand, someone urging 'have a shot'. My hands would tremble and sweat as I rested the gun on my shoulder and led each oncoming flight. I rarely found the courage to squeeze the trigger. The reason was simple - I was terrified of the noise produced by the gun. During those warm Karnataka days, when Karnataka was not Karnataka, but Mysore, I loved to see the Bar headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) flying in formation. They would appear in the distance as specks, and as they came closer their honking could be heard - a strange and hauntingly beautiful sound.

And now, after a year of field study in ornithology, it amazes me at what I have missed all these years - almost in the backyard. The resident birds are interesting and varied enough to keep even the most demanding birdwatcher happy. The migrant birds provide further anticipation and interest.

The Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla caspica*) returned to its winter home in September. The Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*) can also be seen, moving among the foliage catching insects and uttering a characteristic 'tschuk'. The Leaf Warblers (*Phylloscopus* sp.) also come here for winter.

The bird I greatly miss since its departure to its summer breeding ground in the Himalayas, is the Blue Chat (*Erithacus brunneus*). Last year in October, I heard a series of baffling noises coming from the undergrowth. After a lot of patient peering, I managed to make out three beautiful birds, which I recognised as Blue Chats. The Blue Chat is more heard than seen, uttering a loud call from the depths of Lantana and Solanum thickets. Though more prone to skulking in the undergrowth, this bird can be seen hopping along on the shola floor, picking up grubs and insects. It is not a shy bird. I often used to see a male Blue Chat in the eastern end of Sim's Park shola. It was paler blue than normal - possibly a subadult. We used to sometimes contemplate each other - I seated on a fallen branch, and the bird picking up grubs from the ground nearby.

A fanciful imagination is taboo in an ornithologist. When one comes across a nondescript brown bird, it is safer to explore possibilities closer home - a house sparrow for instance, than consider some exotica found only in the Himalayas. Besides during the breeding season, there are usually a number of juvenile birds sporting a variety of plumages, enough to confuse any one.

I got carried away the first time I saw the male Blue-headed Rock Thrush. I rather foolishly thought I had discovered a new bird. It did not strike me that such a lovely bird would not go undiscovered for long. Indian Hill

Birds by Dr. Salim Ali, soon brought me down to earth. This bird goes by the tinkling scientific name of Monticola cinclorhynchos, and makes the Himalayan hillsides its summer home. It is a silent bird, sitting on a low branch and often descending to the ground to feed. I have seen it eating the berries of Chomelia asiatica, though it is mainly insectivorous. Its cousin the Blue Rock Thrush (M. solitarius), is also a winter visitor to the south. The Pied Ground Thrush (Zoothera wardii) also apparently makes a halt here on its way to and fro Sri Lanka.

A silent and elegant winter migrant, a bird of the dark forests, is the Forest Wagtail (Motacilla indica).

The Grey Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus), breeds in the Himalayas in summer and comes here in October. They are noisy birds, seen hunting insects on the wing from tall Eucalyptus trees. -- Also fond of nectar of Eucalyptus and Acrocarpus flowers. Another winter migrant partial to nectar is the Rosefinch (Carpodacus erythrinus). This bird is commonly seen in flocks. Often seen drinking nectar from the blossoms of Rhododendron nilagiricum and other trees.

European kestrels (Falco tinnunculus) look out from telegraph poles, while the Woodcock (Scolopax rusticola) prefers the damp shola swamps. The Woodcock is believed to make a non-stop flight from the Himalayas to its winter quarters in the higher altitudes of the south Indian hills. The honeycomb pattern on soft mud, where the bird probes with its bill in search of worms, betrays its presence in an area. The woodsnipe (Capella nemoricola), also a winter visitor, and likes a similar swampy habitat.

Indian Pittas (Pitta brachyura), can sometimes be seen above 5000' (1500m). Recently a Pitta was recovered from the living room of a keen bird lover in Coonoor. It was released only after being subject to close examination by several excited birdwatchers.

The summer migrants to the hills make their presence felt with transistors and loud habits. But the feathered migrants that come in winter, less jarring and more enchanting, possibly deserve far more notice.



## MIGRANT WADERS AND THEIR ECOLOGY

K.S.R. Krishna Raju

A small study was made between October 1971 and March 1972 at Point Calimere in the state of Tamilnadu and at Bharatpur in the State of Rajasthan, on the ecology of certain migrant waders. The project was an ambitious one aimed at exploring the food, feeding, population dynamics and other allied ecological aspects including their behaviour and distributional diversities. A considerable amount of data were collected and a paper is being finalised under the guidance of Dr. Salim Ali, under whose supervision this project was carried upon. What I am about to mention here are only some of the general observations that are being dealt with in the paper more elaborately.

*Iringa glareola*: Mostly seen in shallow waters (1-2' deep) picking or probing. It has been observed that the average peck rates were different for the same species at Bharatpur and Point Calimere. Similarly they were found more gregarious at Bharatpur than at PIC.

*Charadrius dubius*: Sometimes seen in water and often along the waters edge. Never seen probing; invariably seen picking. They are very fast on foot and were never observed to have picked twice from the same spot. Active during the early hours, at mid-day and again at sunset.

*Calidris minutus*: These sociable little waders often feed in large flocks and the largest flock I encountered during this study was of about 5,000 birds at Point Calimere. They generally feed by picking though not exclusively, along the shoreline. Rate of feeding was more erratic and changes more or less every hour, reaching its lowest between 1300-1500 hours. They were often found to have indulged in Jabbing (A series of pecks at a same spot as if to needle out something).

They are very alert and active birds, settling down en masse at a place suspiciously, stand motionless for a second or two, rising en masse again emitting soft sounds like -- tschik... tschik... This habit of group dispersal and rising aloft momentarily is conspicuous in this and in the other graceful, red legged wader *Iringa totanus*. To a certain extent in *Charadrius dubius* also.

*Iringa totanus*: Seen mostly in knee deep (Birds' knee) waters. From the peck rate data collected it appears that they feed actively during morning and evening hours and the slowest rate of feeding was noted between 0900-1200 hrs. A sudden drop of peck rate was noted between 0800-0900 hours. This aspect was discussed thoroughly in the main paper. They are also found feeding with bill and head completely submerged and at times skimming the water surface for floating algae or for other small insects.

*Philomachus pugnax*: Swarms of them are common at Bharatpur during October and November after which they are observed to be spreading further down to the south. A large flock of about 8,000 birds was observed at a place near

Bharatpur where they were found to be subsisting mostly on vegetable dict. like seeds and other grassy material. A definite relation between the leg-colouration, age and the wing moult is being observed and we are anxious to collect more data.

General observations: Non-breeding individuals of several species of waders are known to stay back in India during summer and this was substantiated by the data collected by the BNHS bird migration teams and my observations at different places in India.

A comparison of the bird populations at both the study areas reveals that different species of waders have definite habitat preferences and birds like Calidris temminckii and Tringa glareola prefer inland marshes like those at Bharatpur while their congeneric species like C. minutus and I. totanus prefer coastal and marine swampy areas like Point Calimere. This could be due to their dietary preferences, availability of a particular prey item or a means of survival developed in the evolutionary process to lessen the inter and intra specific competitions. Some birds of the same species are also known to adopt or explore different food items in two or more different areas, even though all the items are available at each place. This aspect needs to be studied properly in India to arrive at a concrete hypothesis regarding the ecological problems of such migrant Waders.

The peck rates of different species differed considerably (Independent of peck success) and it was found that differences are minimal in one set of congeneric species - Calidris spp., while they are considerably larger in the Tringa species. The larger I. totanus in that genus appears to have more peck rates than the rest. It may be due to the poor peck success, large food requirements or abundance or shortage of some dietary item. This type of studies are to be carried out extensively in India.

The feeding routine for Calidris minutus changed erratically at Point Calimere where the peak is between 1100 hours and 1200 hours, while at Bharatpur the same peak was observed. However, the lowest rates were noted between 1200-1300 hours at Point Calimere and 1500-1600 hours at Bharatpur, which is almost three hours late. Tidal rhythms at Point Calimere may be playing a role in the feeding habits of the migrants and the details are discussed in the main paper more elaborately.

I do not think it is very difficult for a keen birdwatcher to keep a particular bird under close observation and count the number of pecks it makes during a period of say five minutes, or to note every time they see a mixed group the species composition, or to observe horizontal distributional data, etc. Details as to the methodology are available in most of the reference books and the papers that are being published in scientific journals. It is high time for the readers of our Newsletter to develop from birdwatchers to more serious ornithologists. The future of Indian ornithology rests, by and large, on their shoulders. It is a pity that we only have one Salim Ali in a country of this size.

CORRESPONDENCE

## BIRDING IN THE ANDAMANS

J.S. Serrao

Mr. Romulus Whitaker's list of the Andaman birds between the dates 27.v and 31.vi.1976 (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 16, No.10, October 1976) tempts me to seek clarification on the following:

- 1) Common Swallow: If the bird implied by Mr. Whitaker is Hirundo rustica, it is the race gutturalis which is a winter migrant to the Andamans and the Nicobars. There is no resident race in the islands, and in view of my experience with the Common Swallows in the Maharashtra region of the country, the bird's presence between the dates indicated needs investigation. What he calls 'Common Swallow' is perhaps a mix up for the House Swallow (Hirundo tahitica).
- 2) Redrumped Swallow: Is Hirundo daurica implied? If it is, no ornithological worker, including Mr. Humayun Abdulali, in recent expeditions to the Andamans and Nicobars has come across the Redrumped Swallow in the islands. The bird's southernmost migrational limit is Sri Lanka (Ceylon) where it is a straggler. As pointed out by Mr. Humayun Abdulali (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 64: 176), Vaurie in The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna, Passeriformes (1959), p.13 refers to a Redrumped Swallow collected by A.L. Butler in January 1898 at Port Blair, but one does not come across a reference to this specimen in Butler's notes of the expedition published in the Society's Journals Vols. 12 and 13. There is again the likelihood that what is taken as Redrumped could be House Swallow.
- 3) It is unlikely that Mr. Whitaker should have encountered a pipit. The three pipits recorded in the Andamans and Nicobars are migrants of Palearctic birds and it is rather difficult to accept that their stay in the islands covers the late dates indicated by Mr. Whitaker.
- 4) The White Scavenger Vulture (Neophron percnopterus) recorded by Mr. Whitaker needs confirmation. The bird is a rare straggler to Sri Lanka, and its inclusion in the Andaman list suggests some sort of mix-up in Mr. Whitaker's notes.
- 5) Yet one more item of dubious identification is the Brown Dove if the name connotes the Little Brown or Senegal Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis). This bird was 'Recorded in the Andaman Islands (Port Blair) c. 1898; possibly introduced. Not met by later observers, so evidently failed to establish in palpably inappropriate moist biotope' (Handbook Vol. 5:155). Nor does the date range given allow one to take them to be of the race ermanni suspected to be migrants by C.B. Ticehurst (The Ibis 1923: 466) and confirmed as such by Bombay Natural History Society's Ring B-1062 (see Dr. Salim Ali, Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 4:2; 1964).

In the penultimate sentence of the first paragraph of his article the author refers to lack of 'further references'. However, he appears to have overlooked Mr. Humayun Abdulali's papers and notes on the birds of the Andamans and the Nicobars in recent issues of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.

#### VISION IN BIRDS

T.V. Jose

This has reference to the reply to my note on Vision in Birds by Hamida Saiduzafar in the October issue of Newsletter.

Let us concede for the sake of argument that the collision of the koel with white-washed wall was a possible accident owing to a momentary diversion of its attention by its being chased by another bird or some other reason of like nature. If an accident could occur to a koel in spite of the fact that it lives among trees and not among houses with white-washed walls, I wonder, how many times we should witness such a collision in a day in a city like Bombay where thousands of crows, rock pigeons and sparrows live with us!

Yes, speed is another possible factor in the occurrence of an accident. But does this mean that a rock pigeon is a laggard compared to a koel? And is this the reason why the latter meets with an accident while the former does not?

Let us have another look at the issue. It's true a driver may meet with an accident while driving a motor car because of its high speed, but the comparison of driver and his car with a fast flying bird is invalid on two points: one, the driver and the car have separate existence and, two, the driving ability is an acquired one and not inborn. And in actual life experience, I've seen times without number pariah kites, comparatively a big bird, swooping on fish, meat etc. held in the hands of people in thoroughfares and snatching them away dodging and turning and twisting without hitting at people, poles, trees or tangles of electric wire overhead. Example after example can be given to substantiate that speed of flight in a bird is an inseparable part of its mode of life and therefore, the ability to manoeuvre, i.e. to turn sweep, twist and dodge, also grows along with the speed it acquires through generations.

Comparisons from human life are often not helpful to understand a bird, because the mode of life is different.

The answer, still I feel, lies in the nature of visual perception. The white-washed wall must have appeared like a white horizon, which is open space, and the bird flew through it only to experience the unexpected collision.



## FLYING ACCIDENTS

Mosaddique Umar

I refer to Mr. Jose's letter in the September issue. Once, when I was in the catapult stage, I was trying to flush a white breasted water-hen from a water hyacinth covered tank. After I had directed a few pellets to where the vegetation had shown a movement, had clapped my hands and had shouted at the top of my voice, a waterhen flushed and flew straight towards a barrack, with white-washed walls and black oil coated window panels, on the opposite bank. The bird struck one of the closed windows with a loud thud and dropped dead. A book describes the now extinct American passenger pigeon spattering against barn walls like hail. While another observer saw a flock of the same birds, 23 crores strong, flying easily along the Grand Canyon without colliding with one another or the banks.

Driving at 70 or even 80 Km/h, I have found domestic rock pigeons, feeding on the road, get off and dodge my car by the proverbial thickness of the hair but never get hit. While their less fortunate smaller cousins, the spotted doves, are often unable to avoid even a slower car.

It seems that some birds are yet to get adjusted to the outline, texture or colour of man made objects.

I remember another mysterious flying accident for which no man made object was responsible. My friend had fired at a flock of bar headed geese when from the opposite direction took off in a storm of wing beats thousand upon thousands of migratory ducks. Among them, the common teals, the most agile of all ducks, gained about 200 metres in a matter of seconds. Once out of gun range, they gleefully treated us to a spectacular display of aerobatics in mass formation. Then, after making an MIG like vertical climb, one of the ducks fell out of the formation and, with wings outstretched, gently spun to the surface of the river. When I took our boat near the bird, it made no effort to dive or swim away as wounded ducks normally do. Although I examined the duck closely, I found no external injury. The absence of another casualty ruled out the possibility of a mid-air collision.

I will be interested to know my fellow readers' views on the above incidents.

## CROWS CACHE

P.P. Majumder

With reference to the lines about the crow in the Newsletter, Vol. XVI No.9, September 1976, I have a few observations to make.

In most hotels, restaurants and sweet meat shops in Calcutta, it is a custom to offer some food to crows early in the morning before the commence of any business activity. Not only crows, but also house sparrows and common



mynas assemble to share the food. I have observed on several occasions that a crow pecks at any bird which tries to grab its food, be it a crow, a sparrow or a myna. Therefore, it seems that the crow is not only unconcerned about the fate of its companions, but also about the fate of any other species of bird.

However, another event which I have also observed on several occasions leads me to doubt the truth of the above statement in its entirety. I have seen young boys catching crows, mostly those too young to fly properly. And, invariably, within minutes after such an act, hundreds of crows congregated and start cawing and flying around literally creating a pandemonium. On at least two occasions, I have seen crows pecking at the boy, who has caught their fellow companion, until he was forced to let go of his possession. They disperse soon after their fellow companion is released from the 'fierce clutches' and is within safe bounds.

I have also seen crows creating a similar pandemonium when one of their fellow companions met an accidental death by coming into contact with a live wire. On this occasion the crows dispersed after about 15/20 minutes.

Quite some months ago, after I had observed the above mentioned events, I conducted some experiments (indeed cruel!) to find out whether the behaviour of other birds were also similar. I caught hold of a house sparrow, tied one of its legs by a string and took it onto our terrace. With one end of the string in my grasp, I let the bird fly around a little and call out. But, to my utter surprise, no other sparrow showed any concern at the calls of this bird, although many of them were busily carrying on their activities around.

On another occasion, I caught hold of a young house sparrow which was born in a nest in our house. The parents of this bird started calling out because their nestling was in danger, but no other sparrow joined them. After about 30 minutes, I was convinced that no other companion of theirs would join them, and so I handed over my captive to its parents.

This shows that crows are better in some respects than at least one other species of bird.

#### AT HOME

Readers are invited as my own guests for maximum four days and three in numbers. (My home is very small). We have a lake, three minutes walk. A park ten minutes walk and sea shore, one hour by bus. October to February is the best time. Guests should inform us a week in advance.

My address is: Rekha Shukla (14 years)  
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Subscriptions for 1977 are now due. Please send the amount, preferably by Cheque, in the name of Zafar Futehally, or by M. O. at the address given in the newsletter.

*The Editor wishes you a Merry X'Mas and a Happy New Year.*

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